

Canada's
Down Syndrome
Magazine

3.21

Winter 2021
ISSUE #5

**HOUSING
MODELS:**
Canadians Living
Independently

**WORK
SUCCESS
STORIES**

The
**Employment
&
Housing
Issue**

**A HELPING
HAND:**
*Disability
Employment
Services*

*Employment
Readiness:*
**The Next
Steps**

Plus: Promoting Independence in Children with Down Syndrome



Welcome to the Winter 2021 issue of 3.21: Canada's Down Syndrome Magazine!

As this year comes to an end, we will all be glad to leave 2020 in the rear-view mirror. While the new year may start off looking like the previous one, we are all hopeful that the end of 2021 will begin to resemble more of the world we remember.

For many individuals with Down syndrome, we hope this will mean a return to meaningful employment. Those who have found themselves on the sidelines during the pandemic hope to find more opportunities, and more doors opening for them as Canada continues its economic recovery.

Paid work is foundational to independence, as is a place to call home. In this issue of 3.21, we explore the topics of employment and housing, discovering the many varieties of both that are available to today's adult with Down syndrome. With the right supports in place, a happy, productive, maximally independent life is achievable for every person.

We hope the information presented here helps you and your family on your own unique journey.

We would love to hear from you! Drop us a line at 321Magazine@gmail.com with your thoughts and story ideas.

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4 10 18

4 Promoting Independence in Children with Down Syndrome

10 Housing Models: How Some Canadians with Down Syndrome are Choosing to Live More Independently

18 A Helping Hand: Disability Employment Services

24 Employment Readiness: The Next Steps

28 Success Stories: Individuals with Down Syndrome Thriving in Work and Life

34 DSRF Corner

36 CDSS Spotlight

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PROMOTING INDEPENDENCE

in Children with Down Syndrome *-and all children*

by Kristen Halpen

We are surrounded by opportunities to help promote independence. Sometimes teaching new skills and attitudes is planned, and sometimes it just happens organically. At times it is a lot of work, and others it happens way faster and WAY more easily than you ever dreamed possible. Whatever the case – it usually serves your loved one (and you) very well.

Read on for answers parents gave when 3.21 posed two simple questions about encouraging independence. We love these community responses, and the valuable advice from those who have been there... or still are.

3.21: At what age did your child show some signs of independence and how did you foster that independence?

Our daughter has both Down syndrome and autism, so throughout her childhood she has taken longer to master various skills than would a typical child with Down syndrome alone. That said, we've found that at every age there are things we can do to foster independence. – *Becca's parents*



We encouraged independence for Janet from the time she was a young child. If she was able to do something on her own, or able to learn to do it, we encouraged her and we provided supports. We kept at things until she succeeded. – *Janet's parents*

While we always encouraged independence at home (cleaning his toys after playing, helping with some chores, independent feeding), when Alex entered school it really put a focus on being as independent as other kids in his class.

But, the sense of urgency for creating sustainable and long-lasting independent habits really began when I started to understand what independence will do for him as an adult when he enters the workforce. In my role, I have the privilege

to see adults who have developmental disabilities succeed in employment. The main reason for their success is that they demonstrate that they are dependable, reliable, independent and motivated workers. This insight began to drive a lot of my work at home with Alex when he was about seven.

These are attempts to provide him with activities to foster independence in a safe environment... for him to try, fail, receive feedback and correction, and then succeed. – *Alex's parents*

We started at the same age as with the rest of our children based on some good advice - a lovely pediatrician told us that about day nine of Kevin's life to treat him and expect from him what we would expect from our other children. To love him and

discipline him the same as the others without question too. So we never started off thinking that he couldn't achieve a goal, but rather supported him to achieve it.

Kevin's early journey did not vary from that of his siblings. Our expectation was that he would participate in every activity and be expected to follow the pack, which he did with gusto, not wanting to be left out. Our children were very close in age, with one older brother and younger twins. We never ever thought of it as a struggle; some things just took longer! Everyone took a turn at household tasks and Kevin was no exception. Perfection was not expected; participation was. – *Kevin's parents*

We began to consider Owen's independence from an early age. One of the ways we did this was by offering him choices. For example, I would lay out two items of clothing and ask him to choose what he wanted to wear. We did this even before he could speak, but he would point to things. Eventually we asked him to go to his drawers and choose what he wanted to wear and by this time, he was eager and proud to make the decision on his own. This meant I also had to be ok with what he chose and it didn't always match, but he made the decision. - *Owen's parents*

3.21: Where have you seen the most success in encouraging independence?

As with most of Becca's life skills, it needs to be her idea. She won't do things because we want her to; she will only do them when she wants to. So it's about figuring out what motivates her and leaning into that.

As much as possible, we try to give her choices, rather than dictating her actions. Though she doesn't like to be told what to do, she can be highly motivated when she wants something. Once we knew she was able to pour herself a drink or get her own snack, we started having her serve herself when she asked for something to eat or drink, rather than doing it for her. Usually, she wants it badly enough to actually do it, and if she chooses not to, that's her decision. At other times, we use an if/then or reward system, for example: *if you want to use the iPad, then you need to take your dishes to the sink.* She may stall for a while, but eventually she'll do it if the positive consequence is tempting enough. – *Becca's parents*

With each year that passes, Janet becomes more and more independent. The biggest success we have seen is currently, she is living independently with minimal support. – *Janet's parents*

Instead of just "giving" toys - Alex has begun to earn some of his toys with a chore chart...the chart now includes habits and independent tasks - setting the table, vacuuming, doing his

laundry. We have a YouTube channel to share his successes: <https://youtu.be/JTTtULhKmFY>. We are also doing things that drive independence for him at school. Some days he arrives early for speech therapy. One day I said "Just go in," and he did! So now we continue that practice. On regular school mornings he's dropped in the parking lot like any of his peers.

These are attempts to provide him with activities to foster independence in a safe environment; for him to try, fail, receive feedback and correction, and then succeed. We see the most success when Alex can see a way to succeed; by that I mean, we have not had a lot of success academically because he struggles with reading, which you need to have in order to create that independence in your academic work; but when it comes to activities that involve his motor skills, where he has a lot of strengths, he thrives in being independent - chores, taking care of our dog, showering at night all by himself, cleaning around the house, etc. - *Alex's parents*

My strongest childhood memories of Kevin and his independence are around downhill skiing. Kevin mastered a few sports at an early age, but especially skiing. Anyone who has skied with kids knows that the chairlift is often the most challenging part, but Kevin was quick to learn the steps, sequence and timing of it all to get on and off the lift independently.

When it came to standardized tests, we didn't focus on the fact that he might not perform well as they increased in complexity, highlighting his developmental age vs his chronological age. We focused and put more energy into asking him to show us that he had mastered self-care, dressing, chores, and activities. We always focused on having a good time while doing those things.

Kevin showed a strong ability to listen, watch, learn and do ahead of his verbal language. He didn't need to speak clearly to be able to show independence. In the primary grades he was encouraged to create journals and stories using the pictures of his choice at first, then words. As a child he took great glee in "my work."

In later years the best successes worth celebrating were teaching him to get something to eat, to cut up his snack and get a drink. Eventually, he learned how to safely use the microwave and toaster. Then how to fry an egg, and make himself a hot breakfast just the way he likes it! Yes, we cleaned up a few messes, but we did so with all the kids over the years.

These days, we love when he texts us - his spelling is sometimes better than his siblings! Everyone in our family loves to get text messages from Kevin, it has become a great communication tool for him and he uses it not just to plan things or to say hello, he often uses it to tell us how he is feeling. Some of his



siblings live far away and he will let them know he misses them via text.

Now, as an adult, Kevin still thrives on doing things by himself! "I can do that myself!" he says proudly, echoing words from his childhood. – *Kevin's parents*

Owen now takes great pride in doing things "by myself." Yet, Owen will often tell us "I can't do that," before he has even tried. For example, he loves pancakes and used to insist, "I don't know how to cut my pancake." We didn't cut it for him and told him he was missing out on a delicious pancake. Eventually he picked up the knife, we then showed him (using hand over hand) how to hold the knife and use it, and with practice and increased confidence, he was able to do it himself. He now takes great pride in how well he can cut his pancakes! This took a lot of patience on our part and some tears on his part when he missed out on pancakes – but in the end it worked for both of us. We apply this thinking to all areas of Owen's life; we want him to try and we want to support him and we want him to feel the pride in his own success. - *Owen's parents*

Advice from Occupational Therapists on Fostering Independence, from DSRF's Hina Mahmood, M.OT and Arianna Coles, M.OT.

As occupational therapists we are avid proponents of fostering independence and promoting participation in everyday activities that are meaningful and functional for our clients. One of the best ways to do this is to start early. Provide your toddlers with the opportunity to be independent during their everyday routine at home. For example, have them put away their toys, put their shoes by the door, and help with chores like putting away laundry or even feeding a pet.

In order to encourage independence, create a safe and supportive learning environment particularly for unfamiliar or new tasks. Break it down to simple steps and pitch the task at the just right challenge, ensuring that the task isn't so challenging that your child becomes frustrated and unwilling to participate, but not so easy that they get bored or feel that their skills are being underestimated. Use learning strategies that play to the strengths of an individual with Down syndrome. Visual supports and modeling are great ways to engage and teach a new skill and remember that kids will learn best within the context of play.

Be creative! Make the task fun! If there is an activity that you know your child finds challenging or does not like to participate in, think about ways you could work on that skill in a fun way and incorporate their preferences. Something as simple as favorite characters or themes can make a world of difference in encouraging participation from your kiddos!

Finally, remember to celebrate your child's successes, no matter the scale, as this praise and encouragement can serve as the ultimate motivator! Individuals with Down syndrome have a heightened ability to pick up on how you are feeling, so it is important to provide them with that praise and positive reinforcement to keep them motivated and be proud of their accomplishments.



Practical advice on how to get started with teaching or increasing independence - a task that often seems monumental to parents:

1. *Identify one thing a week, or a month, that your child or loved one could easily be doing for themselves that you currently do for them.*
2. *Show them step by step how to do this on their own.*
3. *Gradually help them master each step.*
4. *Praise their efforts, especially when they complete the task on their own.*
5. *Add a new item as a previous one is mastered.*

THE DOWN SYNDROME RESOURCE FOUNDATION PRESENTS



**Independent Housing Models
for People with Down Syndrome
[DSRF.org/HomeSweetHome](https://www.dsrff.org/HomeSweetHome)**

HOUSING MODELS

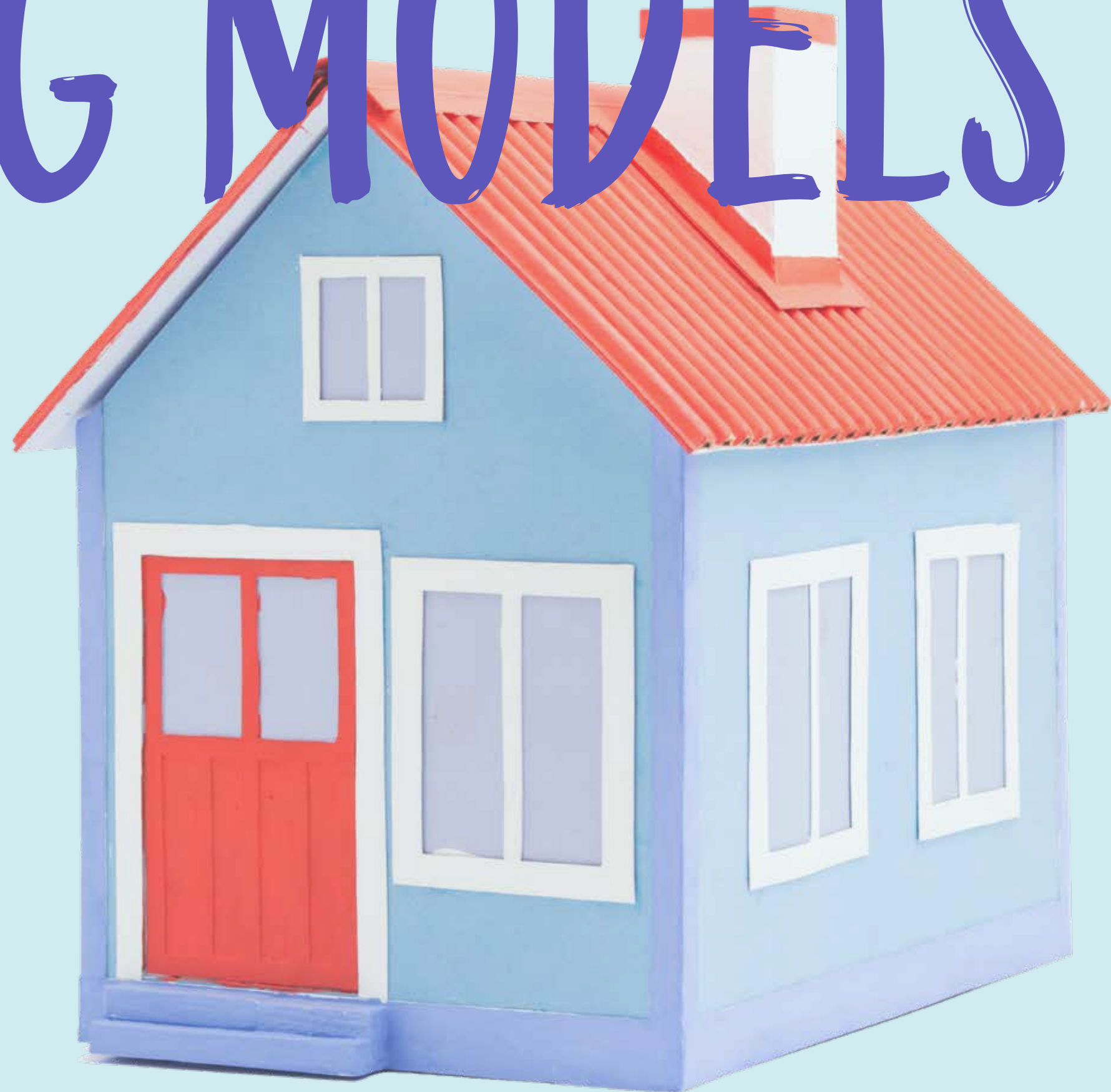
How Some Canadians with Down Syndrome are Choosing to Live More Independently

by Kristen Halpen & Glen Hoos

CEO Ross Chilton of Community Living British Columbia (CLBC) is a big supporter of independent living, with great advice for parents and caregivers of those with Down syndrome entering into adulthood. “Our job is to make sure that they have all those things in life that you and I take for granted but might be a little more work for them. When they have a home, when they have something meaningful to do with their time, and they have friends in their lives, we’re pretty sure they’re going to have a good life.” Chilton believes this starts from a young age. “Have expectations for your son or daughter; believe in them. Give them only the support they need, and make sure they’re connected to friends in their community. By being present in community, and by expecting the community to be there for us, we make life better for our sons and daughters, and for others.”

He sees the future as very bright when it comes to acceptance within our Canadian communities. “Society is becoming much more open to and supportive of diversity. That is true for your son or daughter; they are going to have more opportunities now than they would have had if it was twenty years ago. And I fully expect in another 20 years there’s going to be even more opportunities.”

Housing is an individual choice, with lots to consider, plan, and balance, and of course most considerations and planning are tied to budgets. On the following pages, 3.21 presents five unique housing models and five stories of how these living arrangements came to be. Just like a house, stories and living models rarely represent a square box. We hope you enjoy these unique stories, situations, and the people they feature.



KRISTA MILNE'S STORY

HOUSING STYLE: CLUSTER LIVING

In South Surrey, British Columbia, less than ten minutes from the beach, Krista Milne proudly shows off the apartment in which she lives independently with one of her high school girlfriends. She's especially proud of the kitchen, where she delights in making her own meals.

Chorus Apartments was the brainchild of Semiahmoo House Society, an organization that provides quality services and supports to people with disabilities and their families in Surrey and White Rock. "We wanted to build an inclusive apartment building," says Bobbie, a support worker with Semiahmoo House. "There are 70 suites, and 21 are allotted for adults with developmental disabilities. The other 49 apartments are allotted for regular citizens from the community." As such, the

building is a model for community inclusion, as people with and without disabilities live together side by side.

Krista's friend Mikayla was among the first to sign on when the project began accepting residents. At the time, Krista's mom Patti expected that her daughter moving out was still a few years down the road. However, as soon as Mikayla called Krista and asked her to be her roommate, and Krista shouted, 'Yes!', she knew it was time.

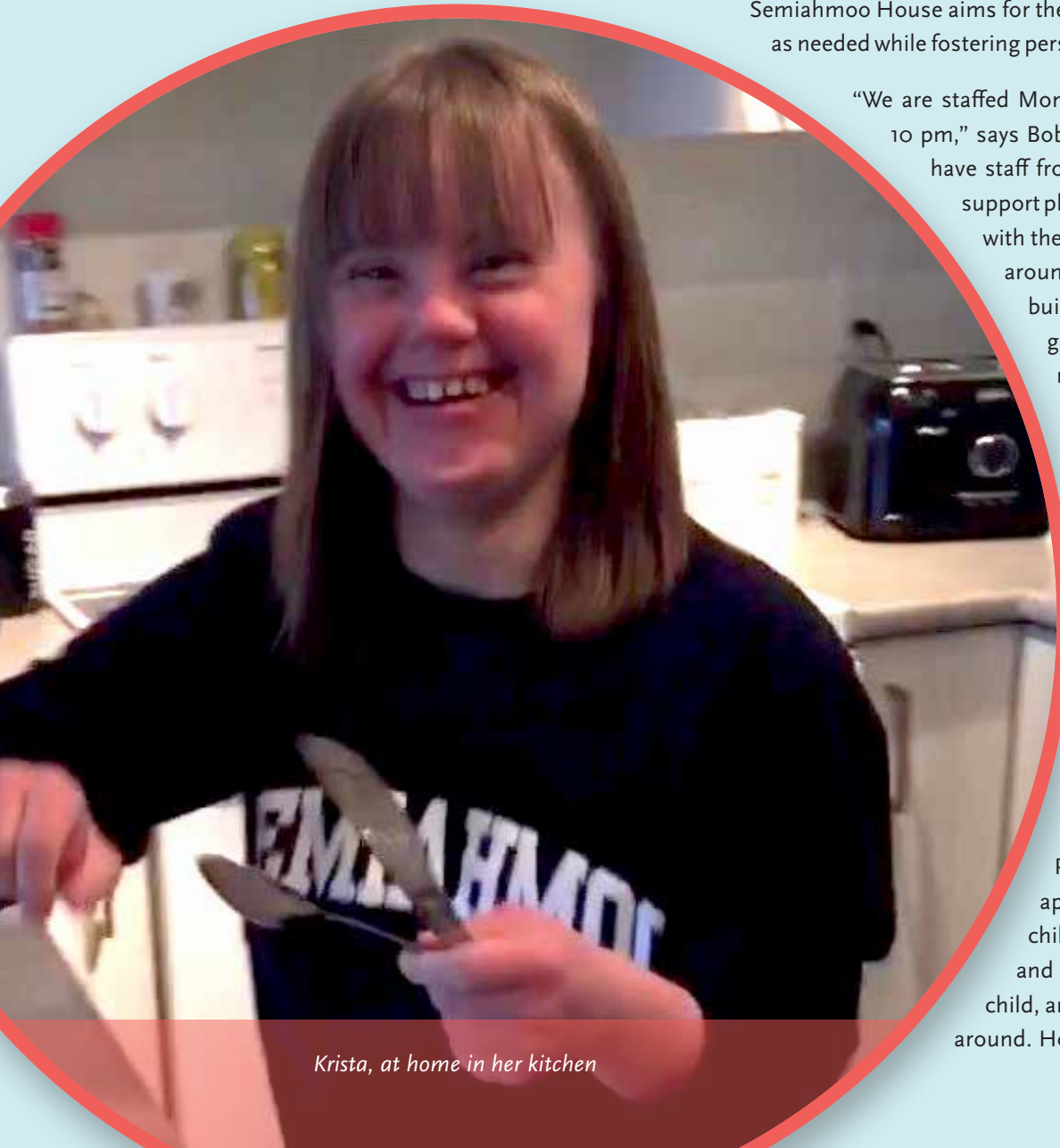
"Before she could move in, we had to go through a personal plan, which was an in-depth study of Krista and her needs and wants," explains Patti. This plan helped determine how much care and assistance Krista would receive.

Semiahmoo House aims for the sweet spot, providing support as needed while fostering personal growth and responsibility.

"We are staffed Monday to Friday from 6 am until 10 pm," says Bobbie, "and on the weekends we have staff from 8 am until 11 pm. There's a support phone that a staff member carries with them 24/7. Because we don't have around the clock care within the building, it really forces people to grow their independence." Each resident has set times at which they receive one on one life skills support to maximize their ability to care for themselves.

"I am so proud of Krista and her independence, and how she's wanted to grow and learn and succeed in life and be part of the community," says Patti. "And all of that is because of the move she's made."

Patti advises parents approaching the day when their child will move out to "be brave and let go. Give more credit to your child, and trust in the supports that are around. Hover from a farther distance."



Krista, at home in her kitchen

DANIELLE FENNEL'S STORY

HOUSING STYLE: HOME SHARE

Sometimes life forces our hand. "In 2013 I became ill," shares Sue Porco. That was all the impetus she needed to begin exploring housing options for her daughter Danielle Fennel.

Sue approached Community Living British Columbia for help, and within a few months, Danielle had been placed in a home share with her new roommate Deb, along with Deb's daughter Kim. Deb makes it sound easy: "We met, we got along good, she loved my animals, and the rest is history," she says.

In truth, "When Danielle first moved in, it did take us awhile to figure each other out. But now, it's terrific," Deb assures us.

Danielle lives on the lower level, where she has her own kitchen, bathroom, bedroom and living room. However, the whole house is shared; Danielle is welcome to come and go wherever she likes. She usually eats her meals upstairs with Deb, and they often watch TV together after dinner.

They have established specific days for laundry and other chores. "We all kind of share the housework together," says Deb.

Seven years later, Sue remains very pleased with the arrangement. "I felt in my heart it was the best thing for her to be with a good person who made her part of the family," she says. And Deb has done just that.

"Deb is very gracious. We can hang pictures on the wall and do whatever she wants in her room; it's her space. She likes it; she loves to be with everybody, and it just works."

Asked to identify her favourite thing about living there, Danielle has no hesitation: "The animals." Nudged by her mom, she quickly adds: "And Deb."

Deb laughs. "If we're second or third, that's okay."



Danielle with her favourite roommate

RUSSELL FERGUSON'S STORY

HOUSING STYLE: LIVING WITH FAMILY FRIEND

Russell's family knew he would move out of the house someday, but argued about when it would happen. "When I'm 18," Russ would say. "I don't think so, maybe at 25," responded Clare Hitchens, his mother. Well aware of the limited housing options for people with disabilities, and as sole provider and decision-maker in their household, Clare had long ago decided that a group home was not what she wanted for him. "I wasn't sure what other options there were, beyond purchasing something and coordinating his support myself, an option that was out of reach financially."

At a meeting with Developmental Services Ontario when Russell left school, they were told about a program called Family Home or Life Share. The program places people with disabilities in a family situation, with the goal to be included in the family's regular life. The level of independence could be negotiated, and suitable matches made. Russell decided he'd like to go on a waiting list.

Three years later, the phone rang, and they were told there was an opening available. They had two weeks to decide upon what once had been a very abstract concept.

Clare did what she always did when faced with difficult decisions about Russell's life. First, she talked to Russell. "I asked him if he was ready to move out, and after a resounding YES PLEASE, I called Lori, his independent facilitator. She suggested we find out more about the opening. If either of us truly weren't ready we didn't have to take it."

After a long meeting with many questions surrounding expectations, goals, and ways of living, they determined Russell was a good fit for the program. "At that point they asked us if we had anyone in mind to be the home provider. This was a pivotal moment for me, one of those where you think you feel the earth turn on its axis. I'd been thinking that they would provide us with some options, and we could make the best match. But they wanted us involved from the ground up. Suddenly I saw his future as something he could choose, not just agree to."

Russell had already been going to spend occasional weekends with a family friend, Eric. He had fun there, and was glad to be away from his mom and his sister for a spell. Eric was asked if he wanted to provide Russell with a permanent home, and the answer was yes. In what seemed like no time at all Russell was moved out.

It's been four years since that phone call, and everything is still going well. 2020 has been rough. The pandemic hit many families hard, with adults living in institutionalized situations having little access to their families. Clare is grateful to have worked something out for Russell outside that system. "While there have certainly been ups and downs as we all adjust to new relationships, it is a great arrangement and he's very happy there." Russell agrees, "I like the people who live there, the food, and the house." He's also added responsibilities, enjoying "cleaning my own room, taking my own medicine, scheduling showers and cooking dinner."

Clare hopes the future is this bright for many others but knows it takes more than just hope: "When I talk to other parents about the program, many say they don't know about it, or that it's not available in their area. This year has been a wake-up call about the limited housing models for all populations who need support. It's time Canada makes choice in housing a priority at the policy and funding level so that all people can have agency in one the most important areas of their lives."

Breakfast conversations are a favourite part of Russell's day



IVY SNOW'S STORY

HOUSING STYLE: LIVING WITH RELATIVES

Ivy's house includes a family of four, with her sister, brother-in-law, and two young nieces all under one roof. The basement, where she has a bedroom and bathroom of her own, is her space.

"I always knew growing up that one day, Ivy would live with me," says big sister Kasi. That time came sooner than expected when the pair's mom accepted a job transfer from BC to Ontario.

"Ivy was going to go with her," recounts Kasi. "But (my husband) Will and I came together and said, 'You know, Ivy has her work, our other sister's here, why doesn't she live with us instead of uprooting her across the country?'"

And so, Ivy relocated to the family's basement, where she has a bedroom and bathroom all her own, while also having the run of the rest of the spacious home. It's the perfect headquarters for Ivy's very busy life.

Ivy – a boxer, swimmer and bowler – has two jobs. She also has many friends who live nearby, whom she sees daily. She does chores around the home and loves playing with her two little nieces. Suffice it to say, she is rarely lonely and never bored.

Kasi admits to a learning curve. "When Ivy came to live with us, there was so much to learn. Staying on top of appointments for hearing aids, eyes, cardiology for her heart, her work, her activities. I really had to adapt to it."

There is no question that the effort has been worth it. "It makes me so happy to see Ivy genuinely happy," says Kasi. "A lot of people might look at something like this and think that the work would outweigh the benefit. Honestly, I wouldn't want her anywhere else. Just knowing that she's with us puts our mind at ease. And if anybody is able to provide that as a sibling, I say go for it."

"We have seen some great growth in Ivy. She always had a level of independence living with our mom, but since living with us that level of independence has gone up significantly. She's very self-sufficient and confident, but she knows if she ever feels lonely or she misses mom, or she's just not feeling as confident, we're here for her."

"I feel safe with my big sis," affirms Ivy. And as for sibling rivalry, when asked if she gets along with her sister, Ivy replies as if the answer comes to a surprise even to her. "Actually, I do, yes."



Ivy, happy to be home after a long day's work

NICK POPOWICH'S STORY

HOUSING STYLE: SUPPORTIVE LIVING

Landings upon Input Housing Corp's (Input) website you are greeted with headlines: "Supported Independence," "Neighbourhood Living," "Transformational," and last but not least, "Now Complete!" Input, a non-profit corporation, has happily turned a 2012 dream into a 2020 reality for its now ten residents, all young adults with intellectual disabilities.

Nick is now 30 and has Down syndrome. Upon entering adulthood, his parents started having conversations with Nick's friends' parents about independent living, as a group. According to Elizabeth Popowich, Nick's mother, the group felt as though "this group of friends could live independently with a little bit of support, but we really wondered how would we make that happen."

The first step was forming a volunteer, non-profit corporation, made up of five families, which eventually expanded to ten. The group's business plan took a unique approach: ownership was key. Input families designed and then financed the project, working with Westridge Construction Ltd. to build a condominium building of ten self-contained units, with common areas and a live-in building manager on the main floor. Today, Input oversees the operation of the building with the on-site building manager, in conjunction with the condominium board. Input residents receive support services through Creative Options Regina, or COR. Offering a financially secure investment, the individually-owned concept "also provides residents the opportunity to become more independent, confident and fully engaged in the larger community," as Input's site indicates. Nick's parents, Elizabeth and Greg, acknowledge the Input group of families as "a committed, like-minded and skilled group who accomplished together what we could never have achieved as individuals."

The Popowich family has planned for the future with a caring, forward-facing attitude. The parents credit the real success of the project to independence, owned solely by Nick. "He has friends and a whole social life that we didn't create for him. He did that," says his mother Elizabeth. Nick's dad Greg adds, "It is wonderful to see Nick connecting and relying even more with his 'family of friends.' The fact that Nick is becoming more self-sufficient also takes some pressure off of his brother, Lucas. The two of them are very close but we don't want Lucas to feel all the responsibility for his brother as we age. Helping Nick do for himself is the best gift we could give both our sons." Nick adds further, "I am most proud of becoming a

man and moving out for the first time. My brother did it and I was really proud for Lucas. Now I want him to be proud of me for moving out as well. It took a long time for this to happen and to have the courage to make it happen."

When speaking about his new living arrangement, Nick has lots to share: "This is my first time moving out and I love every minute of it. My favourite thing is seeing my friends,



Nick, bringing football flair to his room

but especially my girlfriend, Bree. I am pretty excited about all of us living in the same building. I am eating well. I am living my own life and that's how life should be. I also love my new tv, a 65-inch tv that I bought with my money from my job!"

Day-to-day living is approached as a team: according to Nick, "We do lots of things together. We do activities, we learn life skills, we get treated like adults. Basically, it's the whole togetherness that brought this plan together. Every evening, we all get together for supper in the big dining room on the main floor. We all take turns with clean-up after supper. Book Club is once a week on Thursdays and we do Friendship Club once a week. We (also) take a class called, Tell It Like It Is, which is about human sexuality."

It has been a happy adjustment for Nick, but he's thoughtful and careful not to "offend" his parents, saying he's "happy to not be living in a basement anymore!" while adding, "I miss my parents sometimes. I miss Coco (the cat). I miss the Hotel Popowich, where somebody else did my laundry and all the cooking. I love my childhood home; it will always be a part of me."

Input's blog page wraps up the current state of affairs nicely with: "Though it feels as if we have completed a journey, the truth is: this is just the beginning." Nick prefers to quote Aerosmith when offering advice about the journey: "Dream on, dream on...dream until your dreams come true."

MORE HOUSING
RESOURCES &
INSPIRING STORIES



DOWN SYNDROME RESOURCE FOUNDATION:

Watch videos of three stories presented above, and more, at: <https://www.dsr.org/HomeSweetHome>

DEVELOPMENTAL SERVICES ONTARIO HOUSING TOOLKIT:

Explore how to build a vision for your housing situation, complete with steps including financing, options, and managing housing supports: <https://www.dsontario.ca/resources/housing/welcome-to-the-dso-housing-toolkit>

THE HOUSING TOOLKIT FROM THE SUMMER FOUNDATION IN AUSTRALIA:

A workbook-type resource to help with decision making. In depth at 101 pages! https://www.summerfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/publications/housing_toolkit.pdf

COMMUNITY LIVING ONTARIO'S CONNECTABILITY SITE:

(various contributors): <https://connectability.ca/2014/06/14/housing/>

MY HOME, MY CHOICE HOUSING OPTIONS INFO AND CHART:

<https://windsorsexfamily.net.files.wordpress.com/2018/03/my-home-my-choice-housing-options-info-and-chart.pdf>

THE CDSS "HOUSING RESOURCE HUB":

Housing models, Federal Government resources and more: <https://cdss.ca/resources/housing/>

THE FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT:

New Approaches to Making a Home for Someone with an Intellectual Disability by Community Living: <https://inclusioncanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/CACLNHSsubmissionJN8-FINAL.pdf>

A HELPING HAND:

Disability Employment Services

by Glen Hoos & Kristen Halpen

After she graduated high school, Danielle Juilfs did all the right things to prepare to enter the workforce. She enrolled in an employment preparation program at Capilano University, where she received training in general work skills, resume writing and job expectations, and engaged in temporary placements to gain experience. Meanwhile, her father Jim was taking her to his office regularly, where Danielle worked with office staff to complete basic clerical duties. She also learned and practiced various bus routes in order to become comfortable traveling independently.

Danielle was ready to take on the working world... but what now?

This is where many families get stumped. How do you go about finding the right position with the right employer – one who is not only prepared to hire a person with Down syndrome,

but sees the value they can bring to a business, is prepared to invest in the necessary supports, and provides opportunities to make a meaningful contribution?

Knocking on doors and answering “Help Wanted” ads is a labourious process at the best of times. For a person with an intellectual disability, it’s like finding a needle in a field of haystacks. Fortunately, there’s a better way, and Danielle found it.

Danielle and her family connected with posAbilities Employment Service, one of many specialized Canadian employment service agencies that assist with job placements and workplace integration for workers with developmental disabilities including Down syndrome and autism. Like most such agencies, posAbilities’ service was available free of charge to the family. With their help, it wasn’t long before Danielle



landed a job she loves at City Market, where she stocks and organizes shelves, ensures products are facing outwards, and checks the expiry dates of products.

But we're getting ahead of ourselves. Achieving employment is the end goal of a process that can take anywhere from a couple of weeks to a year or longer. How does one get from the starting line to the finish?

DISCOVERY

Every agency does it a little differently, but each one starts with some kind of discovery process. Long-term success does not come from jamming the would-be worker into the first available job. It requires understanding the person's goals, interests, strengths, challenges and support needs, and fitting them with an employer who matches well across all these areas.

Sean Wiltshire, CEO of St. John's, NF-based Avalon Employment, emphasizes the importance of this fit. "By identifying what the employer needs, usually five things, and then finding an individual that has those five, the match goes well," he says. "The ability to deal with any challenges or issues is much easier because the skill and the need are represented and talked about up front and matched. The employee goes into it knowing that they can do this job because 'these are the things they want me to do, these are the things I know how to do, and I'm already a success.' I'm not introducing Bill who has Down syndrome. I'm selling that Bill has a skill, because I heard that this business needs this skill."

It's not just about hard employment skills; life experience also comes into play. "People with disabilities usually don't have the same life experiences that the rest of us have," says Sean McEwen, Director of Operations for Gateway Association Calgary. "By the age of 20, most of us have driven a car, we've gone on vacations with our friends, we've been to a post-secondary institution where we're plotting out a career and relationships and things like that. We don't see that happening necessarily to the same extent with people with intellectual disabilities. And so what I really want to do is look at what are the opportunities they have had and what have they loved about those opportunities, what have they hated about those opportunities? Because a person's values matter a lot when it comes to employment."

PREPARATION

After working through the discovery process, attention turns to pre-employment preparation. This can include the development of skills needed to find a job, as well as the skills critical to success after the job has been found.

posAbilities supports clients through each step of the job hunt. "An Employment Specialist works with the job seeker to prepare a resume reflecting how they can benefit an employer," says Kalena Kavanaugh, Employment Services Manager with posAbilities Association of British Columbia. They also work with the individual to brush up on their interview skills.

At Gateway, they take it a step further. "We actually pay people for their time in the career exploration process," says McEwen. "This is a very unique thing. The youth employment skills strategy for Canada really has a lot of resources to build the capacity. Part of the employment preparation process is making sure that people understand workplace culture and employer expectations. If there's training that we can get in place for them that we can then add to their resume, it makes them more appealing to employers. Then we go out and hit the bricks and we find them interviews for the jobs they're looking for."

The amount of support provided in the pre-employment phase depends on the needs of the individual. Some come to an agency ready to roll, having already completed a skill development program elsewhere. Others need more assistance and input prior to approaching prospective employers.

"Gateway Calgary operates the 'Get Work Program,' which is an employment service for youth with any type of disability," explains McEwen. "We help youth go through the usual continuum of identifying, preparing for seeking, acquiring and retaining employment. Everyone goes through the exact same continuum; the level of support we provide during each of those phases would change based on the person's individual needs and type of disability."

At Avalon, the focus is on the skills the individual already possesses. As Wiltshire says, "We engage with the employer to make sure the right skills are there. But we're going to match you to a job that your skills exist for already."

JOB MATCHING

One of the big benefits of working with an employment service provider is that they have already done the hard work of building relationships with employers, and educating them on the benefits of hiring someone with a disability. As Kavanaugh says, "Most employers just want to know that the person they are hiring wants to learn the job and do a good job. They don't always have all the information on intellectual disabilities, so it is our job to educate them so they can better understand all the awesome abilities people have, helping them to create more inclusive places of employment."

Think of the employment service provider as a bridge between employee and employer. They work both ends to ensure a

match that works for both parties. Says Kavanaugh: "Each individual will be supported by their Employment Specialist to look at employment opportunities in community. As an employment service we have relationships with employers who are looking to fill employment opportunities year round, or we may look at jobs that are advertised and assist clients in applying online, as well as going out into the community and enquiring about possible employment opportunities with employers that the individual wants to work for."

While most agencies work primarily with job seekers, Jamie Millar-Dixon of MacLeod Silver HR Business Partners represents the other side of the equation. As an Inclusive Workforce Consultant, she advises businesses looking to hire, helping them discover the competitive advantage that team members with intellectual disabilities can bring to their organization, and connecting them to people seeking employment.

"The way our initiative works is, rather than starting with the unemployed job seeker, and then shopping that person

around to see who will hire them, we actually

start with employers who have job

openings and are committed to

being inclusive of people with

diverse abilities. When they

have an opening, I do a

recruitment campaign

out to our network of 98

different organizations

in BC's Lower Mainland,"

says Millar-Dixon.

Millar-Dixon's model

began as a research project

in partnership with BC

Partners in Workforce Innovation

aimed at determining whether this

reverse approach is an effective means of

creating more employment opportunities for workers with

intellectual disabilities. The results have been promising.

Although she's coming at it from the opposite direction, Millar-Dixon sees her employer-centric approach as being complementary to, rather than in competition with, the traditional social services model. When she recruits on behalf of a company looking to hire, she reaches out to service providers like posAbilities to tap into their pool of eager job hunters. And when families come directly to her, she often refers them to service providers who are in the business of supporting the job seeker. Ultimately, like the agencies, she is focused on finding the best match of employer, job and employee.



INTEGRATION

Once the match has been made, the focus shifts to integrating the employee into their new position in a way that sets them up for success. This includes putting in place any accommodations needed by the employee, training them in their job duties, and if necessary, working alongside them until they are comfortable and capable of performing the job on their own.

Different agencies provide varying levels of support around this, so it's important to do your research before choosing a service provider, to ensure the individual's needs will be met.

Wiltshire stresses that every situation is unique. "We always say we are here for as much or as little as you need or want. If you want us to come by every day, because this week you're really struggling, we'll come by every day. But normally you only see us once a month. We ask people what they want. We have a client who only calls us when he has his performance evaluation. He just wants us to sit down once a year and support him and his understanding of what they're saying. We always tell the employer we're here too. We don't check in, but if you need us, we're here 24 hours a day. It gives employers a sense of comfort and the employee a sense of comfort."

At posAbilities, the structure is more formalized. "Once you have secured a paid job, we will be there to provide the on the job training should you want, work with your employer to assist them in how they can provide any accommodations if required," says Kavanaugh. "Even when everything is going great we will still be checking in, because we are CARF (Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities) accredited and under that accreditation we are required to support all our job seekers and their employers for the next three years with check ins that dissipate each year. So in year one, you will hear from us as often as every month; in year two, every three months; and year three, twice. This process helps us to provide support if needed, or just say 'Hello' and remind you we are only a phone call away if you or your employer need us."

The service agency provides a layer of support, not just for the employee, but also for the business that hires them – particularly if they haven't previously employed people with intellectual disabilities. "They might be nervous because they don't know how to talk to the person," says Wiltshire. "And that's just something that comes over time. Also, it's giving people the opportunity to both have success and failure and experience and learn. That's how we all learn. Any concerns they have, we tell them we're going to be here. We have lots of history. People trust us because we want the best for them."

For McEwen, it's important to help the employer build a culture of inclusion. "We provide to the employer ongoing consulting,

information and resources around workplace inclusion and diversity, as well as how to use new employees with disabilities as a bit of a coaching ground for diversity and inclusion. You can call us, you can talk to us, and so can the employee. And we will pay half of this person's wages for the first six weeks as a way to compensate you for the extra training that you might have to put in."

Kavanaugh concurs. "Ensuring that we have a supportive employer who wants to learn more about diversifying their workplace is the best place to start." To this end, posAbilities provides Diversity and Inclusion workshops to staff and management free of charge.

A PROFITABLE INVESTMENT

There's no question that hiring a person with Down syndrome can add some complexities for a business. There's also no question that it's a worthwhile investment. "The benefits of hiring persons with disabilities are endless," says Kavanaugh. "Statistics show that a person with a diverse abilities is likely to stay in their job longer, resulting in lower turnover and less downtime in training dollars. Families, friends and relatives of persons with diverse abilities are more likely to be loyal contributors of their spending dollars to businesses that show they hire inclusively. In some cases, a person with a diverse ability may be able to focus on doing a specific task

for a period of time that other staff just never seem to get to, ensuring that the parts of jobs that often get missed are now getting completed."

"At Gateway we work with the employer to demonstrate ability," says McEwen. "If you are autistic, that diversity and that neurodiversity may mean that the employer will have a better organized warehouse, which means they'll be able to find things more quickly, which means they won't waste time, and time is money. We have just helped your bottom line as a business by helping you to understand that diversity is what you need. People solve problems differently."

McEwen is also owner and operator of RealEyes Capacity Consultants - a national group of consultants that work with service providers and employers to build their capacity around employment inclusion. He makes the case for inclusive employment as an essential strategy of the future. "Over the next 10 to 15 years, twenty five percent of our workforce is going to disappear, and the replacement workers for those people aging out of our workforce are going to be new Canadians, indigenous people, people with disabilities, etc. Diversity and inclusion is actually a sustainable workforce strategy. If you want to survive beyond the next 10 to 15 years as a business, you'll get good at diversity and inclusion."

EMPLOYMENT IN THE TIME OF COVID-19

COVID-19 has been unkind to many in the workforce, but the situation among workers with Down syndrome and other disabilities has been particularly acute. In many cases, these workers were among the first to be let go when the pandemic began, and are finding themselves among the last to be called back.

Jamie Millar-Dixon of MacLeod Silver HR Business Partners has seen a significant drop this year in positions available for people with Down syndrome. Fall is normally the biggest hiring season for many of the retailers with whom she works, but the combination of fewer shoppers and more people in the job market has dried up opportunities for workers with disabilities.

Complicating matters is the fact that many people with disabilities are now hesitant to take transit, and families may not want their individual interacting extensively with the public. "It is a perfect storm," says Millar-Dixon. "We're not shopping in stores as much, so retailers haven't had to hire replacement workforce for the fall." On the other hand, a recent recruitment

campaign for London Drugs, who was ready to hire, yielded zero referrals. "People weren't wanting to work."

While Millar-Dixon says the pandemic has unquestionably set back the cause of inclusive employment for the time being, there are bright spots. She points to ICBC for proof.

"ICBC's CEO said, 'We're going to take this downtime to increase our commitment to increase our activities around inclusive hiring.' They had a hiring freeze on, but now they're starting to open up the driver's licensing opportunities and all sorts of things. Every opportunity they have they, they run it through us first, so that candidates with diverse abilities have first opportunity for those jobs. We've worked closely with their recruitment team to revise behaviour-based interviews so they have a set of guides for when they need it. We did some training with their team around unconscious bias influencing hiring managers. So this is an organization that takes a lot of heat in BC, but they are intentional about their commitment, and they've demonstrated that even during COVID."

ADVICE FOR JOB SEEKERS

This is a difficult time to be looking for a job, disability or not. But it's not impossible. Here's some advice from employment service providers to those who are currently on the hunt for work:

"Find out what the hidden skill is, what it is that you're good at that nobody knows. Small successes that we take, we build on. Start from the point of success, not failure. Let's not talk about all the things that are going to be barriers in front of you. Let's talk about the fact that you have the skills to do this. Even if you don't go to work immediately, keep working on yourself. And you don't always have to be going forward, sometimes you've got to go back and make the next big step." – Sean Wiltshire, CEO, Avalon Employment

"I think that right now the focus needs to be on some really, really good support to find the job, so people need to know who they are and what their job targets are. You need to factor in what's happening in the labour market. What are the occupations that employers are really looking for right now? There are occupations that are growing. Don't make it too hard on yourself. Don't look for something that's already shrinking." – Sean McEwen, Director of Operations for Gateway Association Calgary

FINDING AN AGENCY

It's important to find the right agency for your situation. Do your research before choosing one to ensure they provide the kind of support your individual requires. Google "disability employment support services" in your area, or connect with your local Down syndrome support group to find out which agencies they recommend.

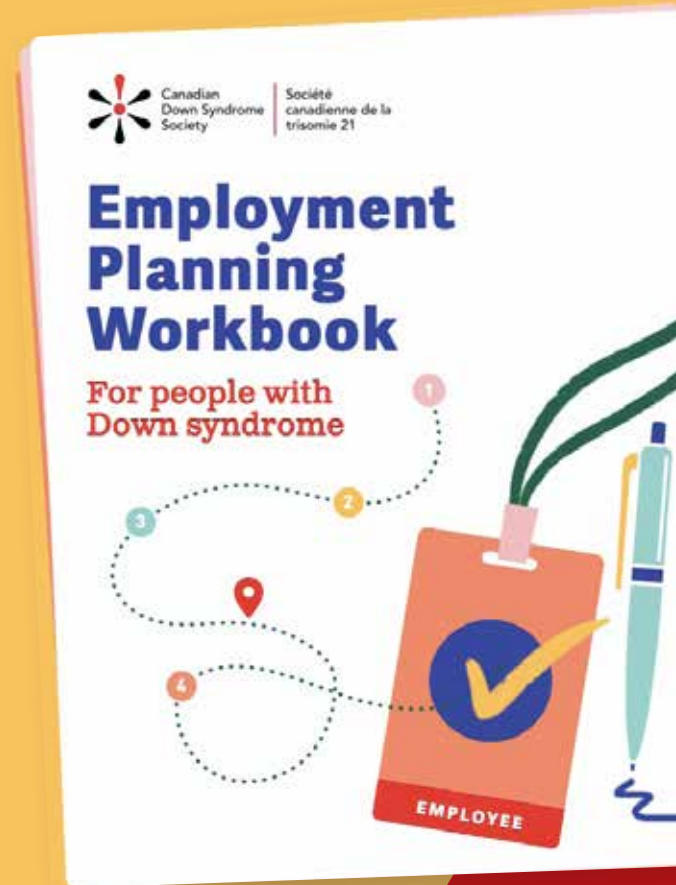


EMPLOYMENT READINESS: The Next Steps

We've learned how different life experiences, learning life skills, and simply talking about what kinds of jobs people have and the wide variety of jobs it takes to 'make the world go round' are key elements to help inspire young people to want to become part of the workforce. These small conversations and events should one day add up to an engaged individual, eager to experience even more.

Further conversations and self-reflection are either going to narrow the focus to one key job, or will have a person thinking about a wide and varied list of jobs they want to pursue. Whatever the employment goal is, you need a bit of a plan to help get you there.

Here are some recommended resources to help bridge the gap between conversation and pen-to-paper planning.

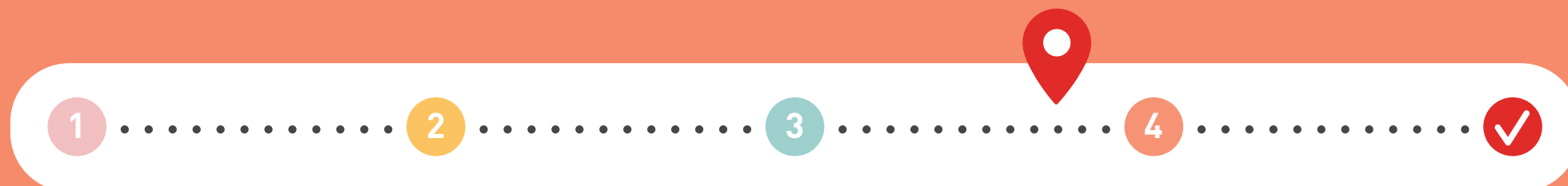


***NEW* EMPLOYMENT PLANNING WORKBOOK FOR PEOPLE WITH DOWN SYNDROME:**

You might be a teenager or young adult and have started to think about finding work. Possibly you are a parent or support person and you want to start having conversations about work. Whoever you are, this four step interactive workbook will help you to think about working, and help to prepare you for the work world. <https://cdss.ca/resources/employment/>

***NEW* THE EMPLOYMENT HUB:**

The online hub has been built for many groups: people with Down syndrome, their family supports, advocates and employment service providers. It serves to help develop personal career portfolios, achieve employment goals, and as an informative area for service providers. It also serves as a reference point when you are working through the Employment Planning Workbook. Check it out today! <https://cdss.ca/resources/employment-planning-hub/>





DSRF LAUNCHES EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE PROGRAM

When the Down Syndrome Resource Foundation reopened its doors to the public in September, the organization was excited to welcome back some key team members who had been missing during its COVID-19 closure: the front desk staff.

The five individuals who manage the front desk throughout the week all have Down syndrome and/or other developmental disabilities. Their return ushered in a new era for the DSRF front desk positions. Along with all the changes due to COVID-19, DSRF has taken this opportunity to create a new approach to providing its front desk staff with more meaningful employment.

DSRF has transitioned these positions to be an extension of its group education programs that focus on employment skills. This paid employment program, overseen by DSRF Teacher Aja Masters, is designed to challenge the team members, in a supportive way, to grow and enhance their skills, increase their independence as employees and broaden their contributions to the organization. It is expected that after a couple years working at DSRF, these workers will be equipped for employment with other businesses, opening space for future DSRF students to take their place in the program.



Thank You to our GO21 community, the organizers, participants and fundraisers. This year was challenging. Hosting virtual events and celebrating with your communities helped us all raise more awareness.

Congratulations, and we look forward to exciting new events in 2021!

cdss.ca/go21

Build Community | Raise Awareness | Fundraise

Holiday Greetings from the

Canadian Down Syndrome Society

It has been a challenging year for us all and as it draws to a close, we just want to say thanks. Thanks for your enthusiasm and generosity. Your support helps us continue to focus upon human rights, health, social participation, inclusive education and employment for those with Down syndrome. We're truly grateful. With the holiday season approaching there are many ways you can inspire others:

- **Consider a family party with a purpose!** In lieu of seasonal gifting, make us your charity of choice at holiday gatherings and gift exchanges.
- **Become a monthly donor** and help us enable independence for people with Down syndrome.
- **Make a one-time donation** to fulfill your charitable year-end giving.

Learn more here:

cdss.ca/donate

THANK YOU AGAIN FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT.

We wish you and your family the best throughout this holiday season!



Employment

SUCCESS STORIES

Individuals with Down Syndrome Thriving in Work and Life



Chris Sayer

As a child, Chris Sayer was a familiar face around Burnaby Mountain Golf Course. His family took him there regularly to practice on the driving range, feed the ducks, and have snacks in the kitchen. Little did they know those experiences would lead directly to his first job.

“Chris got to be well known there and he always was interested in helping out with the servers and in the kitchen,” says his mom Shawn. “We always spent Mother’s Day at the breakfast buffet and the manager asked if Chris would like to run omelet orders and clear tables. That is how his employment began.”

Chris has been an important part of the kitchen crew for the past decade. “I clean dishes – loading the dish machine and scrubbing pots,” he explains proudly. “Sometimes I assist the chef with other tasks.”

Chris’ parents took a hands-on role early on to help Chris successfully transition into the work environment. “Glen (Chris’ father) worked in the hotel and restaurant industry and was familiar with kitchen dish machines,” says Shawn. “He agreed to go to work with Chris, where he demonstrated what was expected and how to be safe. Later, he stayed close by so if Chris had a problem or the staff needed assistance communicating with Chris, he was there.” Eventually everyone was comfortable, and Glen was able to step back and allow Chris to work fully independently. It really helped that Chris’ new co-workers and managers were understanding, friendly and willing to take the time to explain things to him.

It’s those people who make the golf course Chris’ favourite place to work. “When it is really busy and the dishes pile up, it’s hard work. I get exhausted,” confesses Chris. “But I love working with all the people in the kitchen, and the customers who know me.”

A few years into his job, the City of Burnaby took over food services from the independent operator who ran it previously, and Chris had to reapply and go through a job interview. Glen was present throughout the interview process, but Chris answered all the questions appropriately on his own.

Chris is a highly motivated worker who actively thinks about ways to be an encouragement to his colleagues. That fits in with his future goals, which include doing more prep work in the kitchen and helping the chefs more directly.

According to Shawn, having a job provides Chris with a routine, independence, purpose and responsibility. It also gives him extra spending money to enable him to save up to purchase items that are important to him.



Unfortunately, like many Canadian workers, COVID-19 dealt an unexpected blow to Chris’ busy work life. The golf course closed on March 20, and although it reopened this summer under new safety protocols including very limited food service, Chris has yet to be called back to work. He doesn’t know when that day will come.

He’s disappointed not to be working. “I miss the people,” he says.

Looking ahead, Chris knows that when he does return, his job will have changed significantly. “Masks, social distancing, and probably not as many functions and buffets” are just a few of the adjustments he expects. In the meantime, he’s keeping himself busy with exercise, learning to use new technology, FaceTiming friends, and participating in Zoom classes. He also returned to his other job at the Down Syndrome Resource Foundation in September.

Chris’ success starts at home. “We really feel that getting involved as parents along with your child, and spending time volunteering with them, helps to build relationships that can lead to career opportunities,” says Shawn. “Find out what your child is passionate about. Get familiar with the location and the people working there. Spend time with the people in that environment and get to know them.”

And when it comes time to apply for the job, Chris says it’s important to remember the basics: “Always be on time, dress appropriately and work hard.”

For Chris, those things are just par for the course.

Dewlyn Lobo

Dewlyn Lobo and her family have lived in many places. From India, to Nunavut, to Ottawa, wherever Dewlyn lived she found herself a job. Her story isn't about 'pounding the pavement;' it is more a story about setting expectations, having a positive outlook, and self-confidence. As Anna Lobo, Dewlyn's mother says, "In Canada, inclusion is not an option, it is a part of life." The Lobo family's inclusive attitude has been present in their home ever since Dewlyn was born. According to Dewlyn's parents, they "shared the work from the beginning, even when Dewlyn was small. Dewlyn was never treated differently, she had to do chores just like her sister; it was what was expected of the family."

In India, Anna volunteered at a school, and introduced her daughters to the importance of community service. Dewlyn also loved working with children, and eventually, she decided she would like to help at the school. She approached the principal directly about working there, and at age 17 she had found herself her first paid job.

After moving to Rankin Inlet, Nunavut in 2008, Dewlyn spoke to a local restaurant about work. They hired her and she was employed there until the Lobos moved to Ottawa in 2011. There, People First of Canada worked with Dewlyn to secure a volunteer position in the Justice Building, and today Dewlyn works at The House of Commons. She has held her current job for five years, working Monday to Friday from nine until noon.

When Dewlyn's parents are asked about the steps they took to make her career possible, they don't reply with a specified plan or strategy. Their loving response is, "We really didn't do anything special, we just did the everyday things well. We believed that Dewlyn could do so much if we supported her, and we have done our best. Each family is unique, just as each person with Down syndrome is unique, and parents know better than anyone else their own children and what they are capable of. I am sure there will be many who could teach and advise us." Dewlyn, on the other hand, does offer strategic advice for those seeking paid employment. "Firstly, focus on your strengths, what you are able to do and what you love to



do. Second, understand your own energy level, and decide if you are able to work full time, part time, or just once a week, to make sure you have the energy level to do the work. Third, believe in yourself. Do not give up. Write down a summary of all of the things you have achieved, and celebrate what you have done and learned."

Dewlyn also suggests "Finding a positive, respectful, helpful, kind and dedicated job coach," and when in school to, "Make sure to start thinking of what you are good at and what you want to do after school. You have to talk about it, think about it, and dream about it. Co-ops, volunteering and placements are great ways to see what you can do and what is out there. We need to change the way people see us, we need to get a paid job and not be a volunteer for the rest of our lives."

At The House of Commons prior to Covid-19, Dewlyn's on-site, three-hour workday was quite varied, and very busy. It consisted of administrative tasks to help keep the department

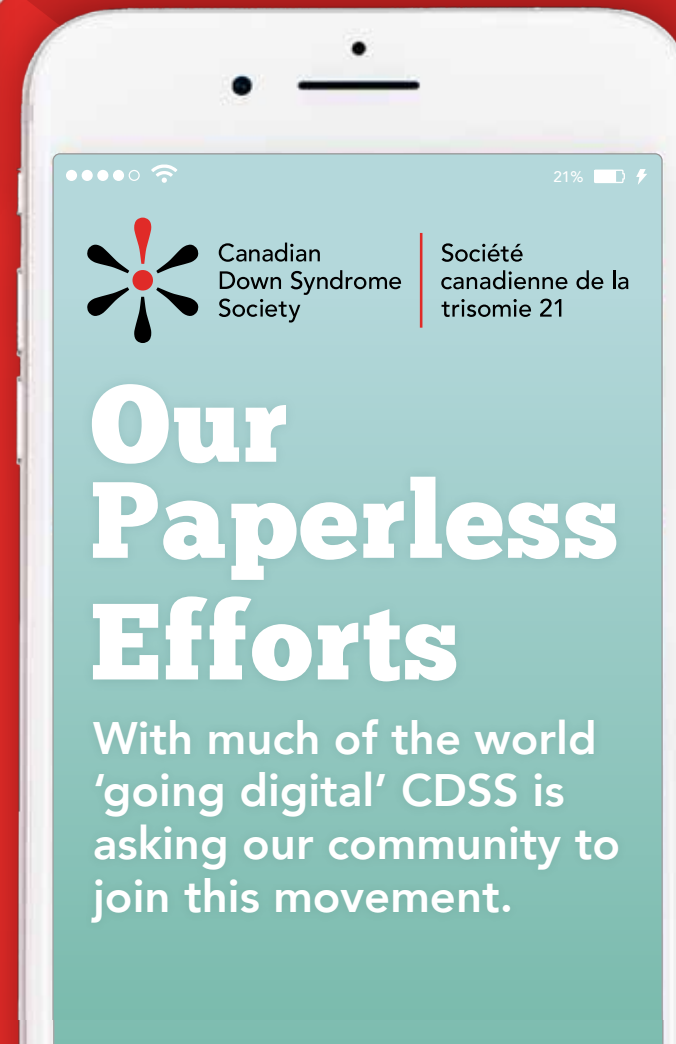
running efficiently, a daily mail run to four different floors, which she described as her "most favourite part of the job." She also looked after a Wellness Library within The House of Commons. She felt the greatest pride from her work centered on the library, although she also speaks of it at the time as the most personally challenging part of her job. Coined 'Dewlyn's Awesome Library,' she says, "The library work had many different tasks and I struggled with some of the stuff." She set some library goals and strove to "be able to take care of all of the tasks I had (independently) for the library." It is interesting to hear that the jobs she takes the most pride in are also the ones that bring the greatest challenge. In Dewlyn's words, "If you want something, you have to work very hard for it."

And work she has: When Covid-19 struck in March, everything changed for Dewlyn when it came to her job. Her health concerns are worrisome enough that taking public transportation and being in a shared office

setting was too risky. It has taken some time, but she is now set up to work remotely at home on a government computer with a safe connection, and has a new resource project she is heavily focused upon. Like she always does, Dewlyn has embraced this recent change with a positive attitude and hard work. "Bit by bit, I will navigate the new project and help build the resource." Some key things have stayed the same: Dewlyn works the same three-hour day, has the same job coach, and interacts online with some of the same staff she worked with previously. Although she, "really knew her stuff before, and that has been a bit hard to let go, she will learn this new role and how to work remotely with her happy attitude," says Anna.

Dewlyn remains busy throughout the week: "I have to do all my other stuff on weekends or in the evenings and I am happy that I have adjusted so well. My life is still full."

Dewlyn is a balanced, grateful person. "I have made friends at work and I value them," adding, "I value my job because it is my dream job. I am a tax paying Canadian like other people. I am a federal employee. I have a reason every day to wake up and get ready to go to work and contribute to my country's economy. This makes me proud."



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Kevin LaChance

Kevin answers most interview questions with “I like...” or, “I love,” and speaks with a huge, enthusiastic smile across his face. He’s been happy with most of the positions he’s had, from McDonalds to sporting good stores, from bakeries to a ski club race crew, and others in between. Now 28 years old, Kevin’s current paid job is with a local pub in Collingwood, Ontario, Beaver & Bulldog.

Kevin’s resume that he and his parents diligently keep up to date is impressive, but getting any experience to put on a resume in the beginning was a challenge. As his mother explains, “Kevin took a co-op program twice in high school. This included job readiness prep and a non-paid, half-day job for the semester. Although wonderful opportunities, they didn’t lead to ongoing employment.” Following graduation, bigger employment challenges loomed, “We were actually

turned away from a local youth employment agency, and re-directed to a disability-focused agency, who of course was not able to provide ability-focused services. What’s sad is that as a Canadian, he met all the criteria for service from any funded employment agency, but had to be separated out to a disability service agency.”

As many with Down syndrome find, after being very included in their community over the school years, upon finishing school they are now ‘disabled,’ and need to be segregated in order to receive services. With few attending post-secondary schools, if planning after graduation does not begin early and pre-employment skill development is not focused upon, many feel as though they have ‘fallen off a cliff’ after graduation, with long days at home, away from their peers.

But Kevin and his family did focus on a life after school, and are big believers in the ‘ability’ side of employment. Their advice is “...to approach the work world focusing on what can

be accomplished versus what can’t be accomplished (yet). There will always be a creative solution to be found.” They add, “Listen to your child if they tell you they really want to do something, even if involvement is small and hours are limited, and also listen when they say they don’t like a job.”

In addition to keeping Kevin’s resume up to date, attending job fairs and meeting with youth employment agencies, his family works hard with him on interview skills, saying, “We attend with him to re-word interview questions, because often people-first language is not used which makes some questions complicated. We also ask for extra time to respond, to help Kevin organize his thoughts.”

“I love going to work and being part of the team,” says Kevin. “I like to meet people and talk, I like to be popular. I like to tidy, I am good at that. I like to use machines, I can do that.” He continues, “I love to taste samples, and to get my paycheque. I am saving for Hawaii.” Kevin is a very loyal employee – it’s clear when he speaks that he doesn’t consider his jobs a stop-gap to getting another job, as other typical young adults may do.

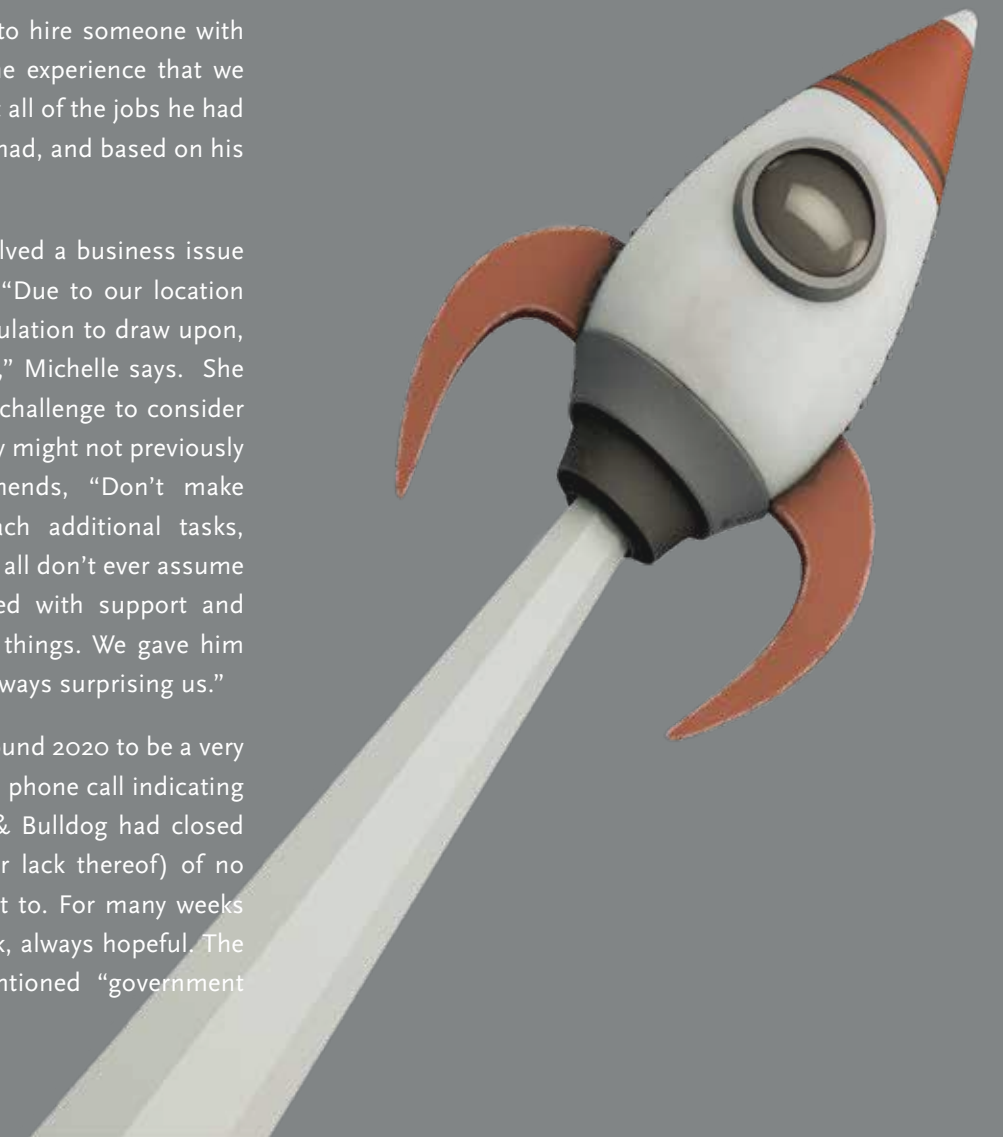
Michelle, who Kevin previously worked for at the Blackbird Pie Company, says that she didn’t set out to hire someone with Down syndrome, “Kevin simply had the experience that we were looking for. His resume did not list all of the jobs he had done, rather, it focused on the skills he had, and based on his skill set he was the perfect fit.”

Hiring persons with disabilities also solved a business issue that Blackbird was facing at the time. “Due to our location in a rural setting, we had a limited population to draw upon, and were challenged to find employees,” Michelle says. She encourages businesses who share this challenge to consider hiring people with disabilities, “who they might not previously have even considered.” She recommends, “Don’t make assumptions based on disability. Teach additional tasks, don’t let your staff get bored, and above all don’t ever assume they can’t do something. Kevin thrived with support and consistency, but also loved trying new things. We gave him tasks suited to his skillset and he was always surprising us.”

Kevin is amongst the large group who found 2020 to be a very challenging year. In March he received a phone call indicating that he had been laid off; the Beaver & Bulldog had closed as per lockdown. The new ‘routine’ (or lack thereof) of no workdays was difficult for him to adjust to. For many weeks he would ask daily if he’d return to work, always hopeful. The point-blank answer which always mentioned “government lockdown” was hard for him to accept.

But the pub was good to stay in touch and provide updates, easing anxiety and helping to understand the situation. One fond memory was from April 7, when the doorbell rang and outside was a large delivery box, addressed to Kevin. Inside was fresh meat, veggies, baking, a gift to all employees. A cookie decorating kit was delivered a few weeks later. Shortly after that, Kevin ran into the pub owners and conveyed how keen he was to return. A week later, he was back, overjoyed to return to work, to his schedule and to his friendly team at the pub.

Life is full of surprises, as is Kevin. “I love to dance. I love music,” he says. And while you won’t find it on his resume, he can make any space a dance floor. If you have a few extra minutes, watch this blast from the past [video of Kevin](#) on a ‘dancing break’ at work. If this doesn’t inspire you to consider hiring someone with Down syndrome, you may need to rethink your entire hiring strategy!



DSRF CORNER

Holiday Countdown

Normally in December, we are counting down the days to our favourite event of the year: DSRF's Christmas Breakfast. Of course, nothing is normal in 2020, so unfortunately the breakfast will not be taking place (cue sad trombone). But that doesn't mean we're not going to have a tonne of fun this holiday season!

On December 1 we launched the first ever DSRF interactive holiday calendar. Each day leading up to Christmas, open a door to discover cool holiday content and a chance to win some very special gifts. Follow @DSRFCanada on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, and visit DSRF.org/HolidayCalendar daily to play along!

A World Turned DownSide UP

Throughout 2020, we have marked the 25th anniversary of the Down Syndrome Resource Foundation. Unfortunately, it has not been what any of us imagined.

The COVID-19 crisis completely upended everything we had planned for this special year.

When our normally busy classrooms emptied for spring break, we had no idea they would stay that way for the rest of the school year and into the summer. By March 18, all our staff were working from home, and all classes and therapy sessions were cancelled indefinitely.

But with every crisis — even one as dire as COVID-19 — comes opportunity. At a time when many of our young students were forced into unfamiliar learning situations that were not well suited to their unique needs, DSRF's specialized Down syndrome support became more important than ever.



Our dedicated staff quickly reimagined every aspect of our programs and services, and by early April we were pioneering online classes and teletherapy services. These virtual sessions were offered at no cost to families facing financial strain during the pandemic through the creation of a COVID-19 bursary.

The remote service delivery model opened new doors by allowing us for the first time to directly serve clients outside our immediate geographic area. There was a learning curve to be sure, but online services proved to be a lifeline for many families. One family even shared that DSRF is more important in the life of their child than school.

As DSRF prepared to reopen this fall, we prioritized the health and wellness of our students, families and staff above all. We went to great lengths to develop a plan

that ensures DSRF continues to be a safe and trusted place for people with Down syndrome to receive the support they need to achieve their full potential.

Our COVID-19 adaptations included glassing in our front desk area, the creation of several new modular office spaces, and retrofitting of existing therapy and education spaces to enable physical distancing or separation during sessions. We invested in new safety equipment that allows our therapists to work face to face with students who require direct support, and to do so without fear or risk. We also upgraded our IT infrastructure to power virtual service delivery.

As a result, DSRF is positioned to grow and care for even more students through the remainder of the pandemic and beyond. In fact, registration for our Fall 2020 of programs and services, which are being offered through a combination of in person and online sessions, was up across the board compared to our pre-pandemic numbers.

Each year at this time, we ask our supporters to UPend expectations, UPgrade quality of life and UPlift individuals with Down syndrome by donating to our DownSide UP campaign. This year, your support will be more impactful than ever. Any amount you are able to give will go directly towards the COVID-related modifications necessary for us to serve families during the pandemic.

Please donate online by December 31 at DSRF.org/DownSideUp. Thank you for helping us to continue caring for our families in this most challenging of times.

DSRF Nominated for Business Excellence Awards

We are delighted that our efforts this year were recognized with two Burnaby Board of Trade Business Excellence Award nominations. DSRF was nominated in the Healthy Workplace and Non-Profit Organization of the Year categories. Thank you to the BBOT for this honour.

2021 DSRF Calendar

The year we've all been waiting for is finally upon us. As you eagerly bid farewell to 2020 and jump into a new year that simply has to be better (right?), pick up a copy of the 2021 DSRF wall calendar. Each month, an adorable child or stylish adult with Down syndrome will smile down upon you. The calendar is also packed with key dates for DSRF programs and events throughout 2021 so you won't miss out on anything. Purchase your calendar by calling our office at 604-444-3773.

UPCOMING AT DSRF

DSRF's Interactive Holiday Calendar – December 2020
<http://DSRF.org/HolidayCalendar>

DownSide UP Campaign – December 2020
<http://DSRF.org/DownSideUP>

World Down Syndrome Day – March 21, 2021

Up the Down Market Calgary – April 22, 2021
(tentative; in person or virtual)

BMO Vancouver Marathon – May 2, 2021
(in person or virtual)

Run Up/Run Apart for Down Syndrome – June 6, 2021
(in person or virtual)

FRIENDS OF DSRF

DSRF is privileged to call the City of Burnaby home. This fall, the City generously invested \$10,000 in our educational programs and therapy services for children with Down syndrome. Thank you for helping our students grow to reach their full potential as contributing members of our community.

As we've seen in this issue of 3.21 Magazine, meaningful employment is critical to independence and life satisfaction. We are grateful to RBC for investing \$20,000 in DSRF's pre-employment programs for adults with Down syndrome. Your support makes a world of difference and sets our students up for success.

The Loyal Protestant Association has been a faithful supporter of DSRF through the years. Most recently, they granted \$7,500 towards DSRF's one to one reading program for children and youth with Down syndrome. We thank them for their ongoing generosity.

This fall we reimagined our annual Up the Down Market Dinner series as a virtual event. Thank you very much to all the sponsors, volunteers and participants who made this endeavour a smashing success (financially, if not technologically). Up the Down Market Toronto, Vancouver and Montreal (known locally as Action 21 and co-hosted by RT 21) collectively raised over \$240,000. This incredible investment is essential to DSRF's ability to support families through the pandemic.

Thank you to Walmart for granting \$1,000 in support of DSRF's programs. We appreciate your support.

THE DOWN SYNDROME RESOURCE FOUNDATION PRESENTS: WINTER WONDERLAND



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@DSRFCanada on all our platforms



CDSS SPOTLIGHT



Project Understood News

Hundreds of you helped this project move forward! Google AI continues to analyze the voice data received to date, with some participants asked to complete a second set of recording data to advance the research study further.

If you are 18 years of age or over, have Down syndrome and speak English, there is still time to participate! Visit www.ProjectUnderstood.ca



Interested in Serving on a Great Board of Directors to Help Work Towards a Common Mission and Vision?

CDSS is seeking applicants from across Canada! We have a deeply committed and talented volunteer board with a wide variety of professional and personal experience. While no experience serving on a Board of Directors is necessary, applicants must be residing in Canada, and must commit to serving a two-year term.

Details about the roles and responsibilities of the CDSS Board of Directors, and a fillable application form is available on the CDSS website.



SEMAINE CANADIENNE DE LA TRISOMIE 21! du 1^{er} au 7 nov.

Way to Go Canada! We hope everyone enjoyed following and sharing stories about new Down syndrome community initiatives, awareness and educational activities, celebrations, proclamations, individual accomplishments and inspiring stories of inclusivity. We have much to celebrate and to keep working towards. Thank you to all who supported this week of awareness and for everything else the Canadian community works towards throughout the year.

Within CDSS's virtual walls, the week of November 1-7 launched our first Canadian employment resource, our first formal step towards supporting siblings of those with Down syndrome, our first Canadian Down syndrome response survey, and our first online gathering of Down syndrome groups in Canada. Follow our social channels and sign up for our email news to keep up to date on these projects and many more. Results from our community survey will be shared soon.

We've Moved...and the CDSS Team is Growing!

You can now find the CDSS office at:
Suite 202, 1001 1st St SE Calgary, Alberta T2G 5G3

Most of our staff continues to work remotely. Our physical office remains open and lightly staffed Monday through Friday, 8am to 4pm MST. You can still get in touch with us toll-free at 800-883-5608, and locally/internationally at *01-403-270-8500.

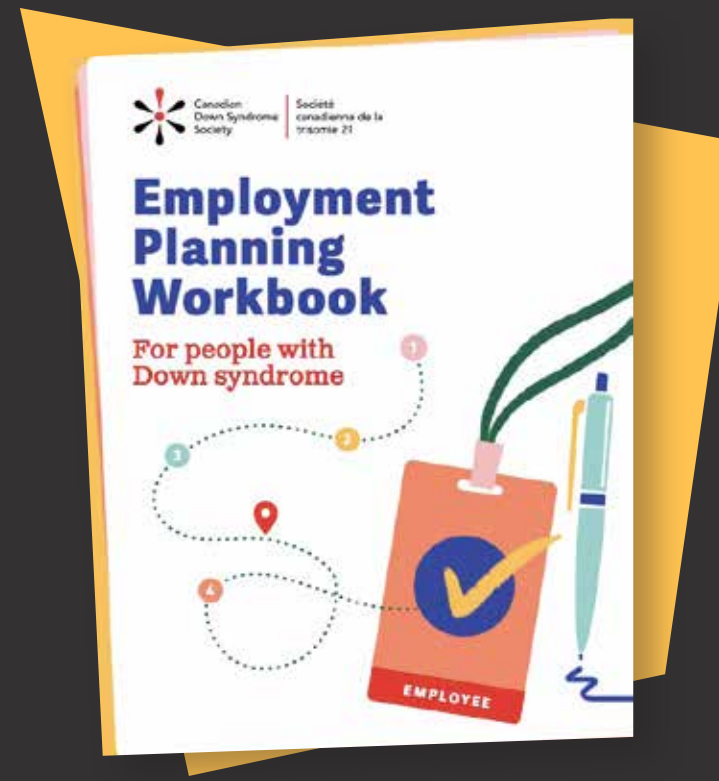
CDSS welcomes Kate White as our new Director of Development. Kate has spent the last decade of her career in healthcare philanthropy, inspiring people to help make a difference in the lives of Canadians. Since joining the CDSS team this fall, Kate is "...impressed to see collective organizations working together with CDSS to solve some of our Down syndrome communities' biggest challenges, and to celebrate our biggest successes. Fundraising lies not just in what we raise but in how we raise it!" Welcome Kate!



CDSS RESOURCE NEWS

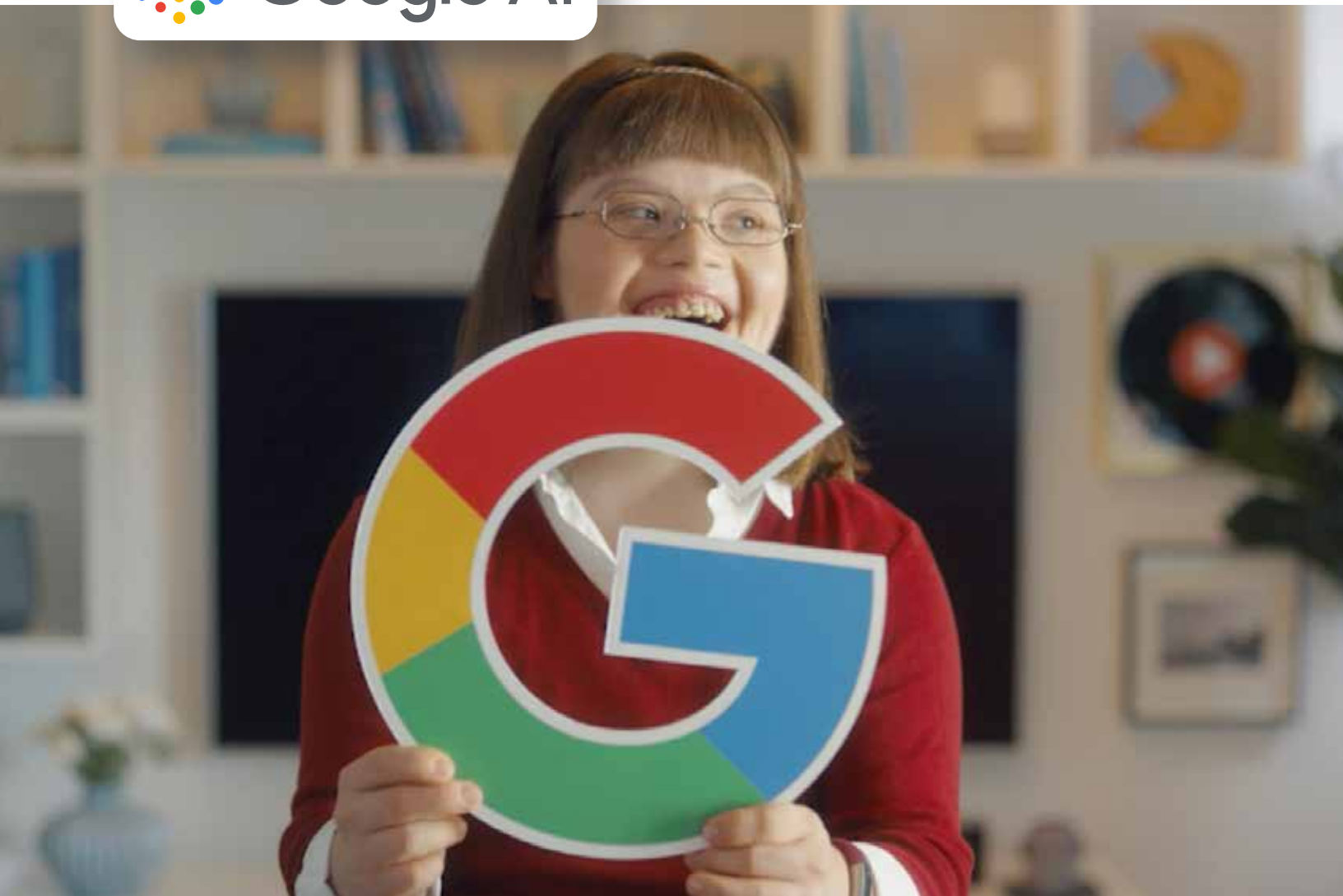
One of CDSS's key strategic initiatives for 2020 and beyond is to strengthen our employment resources. As featured on page 25, our new Employment Planning Workbook provides self-advocates and their supports tools and exercises to aid in employment planning and preparations and will be available in English and in French. CDSS's online Employment Hub will expand further this winter, bringing you even more valuable, in-depth employment resources that will help job seekers reach their employment goals.

Covid-19 has resulted in a surge of webinars, videos and other vital resources from many individuals and groups, all in an effort to support those with Down syndrome through all life stages. Please reach out to us with links to seminars and online resources that you have found beneficial in your own journey: email awareness@cdss.ca.



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@CdnDownSyndrome on all our platforms





UPend
expectations

UPgrade
quality of life

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Down syndrome

DONATE NOW



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