ACF: Accessible Recreation

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**Host**: Eric Molendyk

**Panelists**: Megan Williamson, Shira Standfield, Ross Macdonald, Em MacFarlane, Teri Thorson

Thank you for attending our Accessible Community Forum on Accessible Recreation. This forum is being recorded and streamed to the ConnecTra Society Facebook page and the Disability Foundation, YouTube channel.

Before we begin, we'd like to take a quick moment to let you know how you can join an opinion research panel made specifically for British Columbians living with disabilities.

For 25 years, the Disability Foundation has been fostering meaningful experiences for Canadians with disabilities through outdoor recreation, social connectedness, innovative adaptive devices and more. Today we are asking; how has the pandemic affected you? Help strengthen decision-makers’ understanding of your needs and experiences by joining an online opinion research panel consisting solely of people with disabilities and their caregivers. Make a difference in your community today.

**Eric**: Happy Friday everyone, my name is Eric Molendyk. I'd like to welcome everyone who is participating in our Accessible Recreation Community Forum. This is presented by the Disability Foundation and co-hosted by the ConnecTra Society. We're having this forum today to talk about issues around access to adaptive recreational opportunities. And of course, here at ConnecTra, we want diverse opinions. We want a safe space to share ideas, and hear what others have to say. Our goal is always to have a healthy dialogue and a learning experience for all. We've already gone over the housekeeping so I'm going to introduce our panelists. Starting off with a familiar face, she's been part of our BCMOS programming, Megan Williamson. Megan is a Head Coach at Ocean Rehab and Fitness. She is also a Head Educator at North American Council and Inclusive Fitness. We have Shira Standfield from Parks Canada. We have Em MacFarlane Oliemans, who is the Open Adventures Lead for Power to Be in Victoria, and we have Teri Thorson, who is with SCI BC and a former Paralympian. Terry is part of the peer program at SCI BC. Next, we have Ross Macdonald, who is the Executive Director of SportAbility. Ross also works with the City of Surrey as part of their Accessibility and Inclusion Team. I’d like to thank all members of our panel. I want to invite the panel to tell us more about themselves.

**Megan**: My name is Megan and I'm the Head Coach at Ocean Rehab and Fitness. I'm also the Head Educator at North American Council of Inclusive Fitness, where we help teach and train other fitness professionals the skills and fundamentals to work with clients with physical disabilities. This includes adapting their spaces so they can feel more comfortable and have the equipment and options they need to get exercise. I'm really happy to be here. This is my first time on this panel, so I'm really looking forward to hearing what the community has to say and hearing some new ideas that might come up from others on the panel. So, thank you.

**Shira**: My name is Shira Standfield. I work for Parks Canada, and my role is in the Visitor Experience Branch focusing on accessibility and inclusion. I'm also a landscape architect, and I’ve had many years working, designing and creating parks. I'm an active outdoors person as well as a wheelchair user. I'm happy to be here, I'm really be interested in hearing what people have to say about outdoor recreation and active spaces and to find out how we can make things more accessible at Parks Canada

**Em**: My name is Em, I work for Power to Be. I'm based in Victoria, but we have an office in North Vancouver as well. We provide adaptive outdoor recreation opportunities for people living with a barrier to getting into nature. I'm really privileged to work alongside some incredible folks who provide really great adaptive opportunities for people in the community, and expanding our reach into the mainland. I'm really excited to be here and I would echo what Megan said. I've never been part of this panel before and I'm really excited to learn from everyone here and see what we can do to make all our communities in BC just that much more accessible.

**Teri**: Hi, everyone. My name is Teri Thorson. I am here to provide my lived experience as a person with spinal cord injury of 25 years. I’m pretty involved with different sports, I was a Paralympian in the Athens 2004 Games in Athletics, and also on the provincial team of wheelchair rugby. I sit on the BC Wheelchair Sports board, and have been involved with different activities and sports and hobbies for quite a long time. I’m hoping to provide my experiences to help you out.

**Ross**: Ross Macdonald, Executive Director with SportAbility. I've been involved in inclusive recreation and sport for over 20 years. Before then, I was an athlete in wheelchair basketball and pro-soccer at various levels from juniors to the national team program. I’m excited to be here and to hear people's experiences and thoughts and hopefully share some my experiences and and thoughts as well. Hopefully we can create some development for the future. Thank you for having me on the panel.

**Eric**: What we're first going to talk about in the forum is indoor recreation. As we move along, you can type your questions and comments into the chat, and we'll try and get to as many as possible. But leading into the forum, we sent out a survey and we do have some responses that I'd like to get the panelists’ feedback on. One of the main questions or concerns that kept coming up in our survey was about staff training and more volunteers when people go to do indoor recreation. They feel that people are not properly trained or educated to work with people with disabilities. The panelists speak on measures that are currently being taken to ensure that this is not the case in the future, or what's going on to make the experience better for the person with a disability as far as training of staff and those at the facility. Megan, would you mind just giving your thoughts on that question, as far as training and working with people with disabilities and how staff can be better prepared?

**Megan**: A few years ago, Ross, myself, Steve Ramsbottom and Marni Abbott-Peter went into quite a few of the rec centers in Surrey and Burnaby and did some hands-on training with the recreation staff. We didn't just work with the trainers, we also worked with group fitness instructors, program managers, gym managers, and gave them a basic rundown on what it’s like to work with someone with a disability. We talked a bit about sport and disability and then we took them into their facilities and showed them how to adapt certain equipment, and why maybe a space isn't accessible enough, and how they can change it. Quite a few of those gyms are equipped with something we call the “toolbox”. It’s essentially a box full of equipment that somebody with a disability might need to adapt the gym equipment. Things like active hands, which can help if you have grip compromises, medicine balls with handles on them that are easier to hold, therapy bands, and chest straps for anybody that is a higher-level quadriplegic and might need more support. Tools like that can be kept behind the desk so that they wouldn't get distributed among the other community members. This would allow somebody with a disability to come in and know that they had some adaptive equipment available when they wanted to use the facilities. Also, just recently, we created a course at the North American Council of Inclusive Fitness called Breaking Barriers. It’s geared toward kinesiologists, fitness professionals and group fitness instructors. This course takes you more in depth into working with clients with disabilities and gives them the tools to adapt their space, become more inclusive in classes and with online clients. We talk a lot about the difference between virtual and in-person, public spaces and home gyms. That course just launched this June and the goal is to start partnering with other fitness groups and accreditations so we can get more trainers with that course under their belt so that they have the knowledge and can take on clients with physical disabilities.

**Ross**: The best thing for an individual to do, and I do it as a person with a disability, if I go to new facilities, I ask questions. First, I inquire what there is, and what do I have access to. Once I have the information, I can provide feedback. The best way is to be constructive, because people are open to new ideas. They don't know what they don't know. If you're a person with a lived experience, you can provide a lot of insight for staff, municipalities or groups to build off for the future. One thing I've learned is that every facility works within a system and the systems are large, so things don't usually happen right away. If you have input and you can connect with the right people, progress can be made. From a City of Surrey perspective, I encourage people to email inclusion@surrey.ca which goes to our Accessibility and Inclusion Team. We take the feedback and can hopefully do something with it. One thing I've learned is that people are very data driven. It doesn't have to be a research project, but if a number of people say; I really think staff could benefit from this training, or this education, and we have 10 people to do it, that's great because we can take that information and build off of it. We do rely on people like Megan and other community groups that are experts to bring that training to us. If you know of a group, please let us know. You know, we would be happy to learn more, ourselves. That's how I connected with Megan and is how we were able to do some fitness training and it's been great.

**Teri**: From my experience, being open and honest about your needs when you go in to talk to them as an individual with a disability. I don't have any hand function and need some support getting hooked up to certain machines. I do believe there's a list that you can bring to your community center if you want to have certain equipment available. Another thing that I've known that people have done is get together with other individuals in their communities that have disabilities to advocate together, and then of course, you have these organizations that can help if they want more assistance.

**Eric**: Another common barrier that people with disabilities face is a financial barrier to participating in indoor recreation activities. Could the panel speak more on subsidies for adaptive equipment, and ways that people can be supported that are facing these financial difficulties? What's being done to improve the financial barriers that would block somebody from participating in indoor recreation? I'll ask Teri’s opinion. She of course is very active and a former Paralympian. How fitting as we are in the Paralympics, and good luck to all of our athletes. Teri, what are some ways that we can make fitness more affordable?

**Teri**: I attend a lot of virtual sessions now, and because transportation is a bit of an issue as well and I have tried to look at other options, like the PARC Facility, which is in Vancouver. If you live in a more remote area, that may be a bit difficult.

**Megan**: Teri made a really good point, PARC, the Physical Activity Research Center, for those of you that live in the Vancouver area, that is a really good option because you don't have to pay anything to go there. For people that don't live near Vancouver, or don't qualify for the study, the Disability Foundation has a lot of awesome programs that are completely free and you can stream them from your home. There are some different yoga ones, and I know in my class, all of the exercise equipment that I use is stuff you can find around your house. You don't need fancy equipment to get a good workout. Especially if you are working with some limitations. I think the most expensive thing that someone might want to use in a class might be a pair of dumbbells, and even then, people can use water bottles or soup cans. There are lots of different ways to work out without using equipment. That knowledge and being comfortable in an environment where you're being directed and knowing you're not going to hurt yourself. If you're living with symptoms, not making those symptoms worse, but working with them. In addition to the Disability Foundation, there are tons of programs out there that are adaptive and completely free, probably because of the pandemic. I think things kind of moved in that direction, but I don't think it's going to change. Sometimes it's just about asking the right person: where are all these classes, where are we finding them? Even PARC has their own online classes that are free as well. If you are looking for one-on-one training, Ocean Rehab and Fitness has an online platform called Ocean Insider Club and for as little as $30 a month, you can work one-on-one with the trainer. We do have those programs too, which are way more affordable for some people than bringing someone with them to a gym, which was the goal of that program. If anybody wants more information or wants to know about other classes outside of the Disability Foundation, I'd be more than happy to compile a list.

**Eric**: Another idea mentioned in the survey was the feeling that there is a lack of options for indoor recreation opportunities for people with disabilities. We've talked about some of the barriers, but this question addresses the overall lack of opportunities, period.

**Ross**: I'd be interested to know what people are looking for. From a general recreation perspective, especially in the adaptive or inclusive world, programs are created based on interest or people asking questions. A lot of programs have been created because community members or organizations came forward and identified a gap and asked a municipality, or another group for help to address it. For example, with SportAbility, and a partnership with the city of Surrey, there was a gap in learning how to play sports which led to programs such as boccia, para-soccer, para-hockey, wheelchair basketball, being created. Now, people that want to play at a recreational level can participate and gain that experience and progress to a club level. In other areas like social recreation, or other recreational activities, there are fewer programs for adults. I encourage people to talk to their local community and say: I really liked this program, I've seen this in other areas, these are the benefits of it. Then people can have that information to build off of, and that's how lots of programs are created. If anyone is interested in boccia, para-soccer or para-hockey, SportAbility has an equipment loaning program, because adaptive equipment is expensive. We will present the fee upfront, because with any operation, you need money to operate, however, we don't want that to be the difference between somebody participating and not participating. If somebody says: I really would like this piece of equipment or to participate in a SportAbility program, but I can't afford it. That's okay. We can have a conversation. We don't want that to be the reason that you don't participate. That's why we exist as a nonprofit entity and a charity. So again, I'll come back to program access, just communicate and let us know what you'd like to see. We love hearing about new programs, because we don't know everything.

**Eric**: You talked about the equipment loan; how long can someone loan a piece of equipment? What's the average length of a loan? If you're completely busy and you don't have time to join a league, what are your suggestions for how people can still participate?

**Ross**: For the loan program, we've had people that have had pieces of equipment for years and we don't have a cap. The program is still evolving because it’s only been running for the past few years and we're still learning of the ins and outs. Luckily, we've never had a situation where we weren’t able to provide the equipment and haven't had to cap somebody's time to provide the option for somebody else. We need more people coming to get equipment which is why we ask you to come and join our programs. We also have people that have the equipment and are in remote areas and are participating from home. That's one silver lining of COVID, is that the virtual world is essentially an answer, and during the past year, we've done a lot of virtual engagements and we've gained a lot of people. And now people are building off that. One of our national partners, Boccia Canada started making kits so people could play boccia at home. You're going to see more of these programs evolving over the years, because the virtual world is going to become more constant. We still love to see people in person but we also know, that transportation can be an issue and we recognize that we have to reach out to people virtually.

**Eric**: What’s a good way for a complete novice, a complete beginner to get started and join a group or an indoor activity?

**Teri**: Sometimes, as a person with a disability, I don't even know what to try. I had no idea what opportunities were available to me, and really, the opportunities are endless. It's my own imagination that limits those opportunities. It's pretty amazing, actually, what's out there. Connecting with other peers and your community, or sport organizations. Say, for example, I want to try dancing. Are there any dancing groups around? BC Wheelchair Sports does have different locations throughout the province and they host “Have a Go” days. There's one that happens at GF Strong occasionally, and they also happen in different communities so you can visit their website and check out the events. I think they’re having a traveling roadshow right now where they're going to different communities and, and bringing chairs with them to let people try out different sports. I believe BC Wheelchair Basketball has something similar. A good way to start is by connecting with Spinal Cord Injury BC, PARC, Ross, or Megan and we're all kind of connected to each other. If we don't know, we know who to ask.

**Eric**: There's been a great discussion about resources that are available and equipment behind the counter, but what if you get to a community center and there is no equipment whatsoever? What are some ideas if there is no equipment?

**Megan**: If you take some free online classes, you’ll have an idea of equipment that would be useful in a space like that. Then you can go into the community center and ask them if they can get some of that equipment in this gym. A lot of the time, you don’t need super fancy things but sometimes just you just have to ask. The programs are based off of what is wanted and if nobody's telling anybody what they want, or what they need, it's not going to happen. The Ocean Insider Club online subscription that I built was only built because of a friend of mine. She is a paraplegic and has played wheelchair basketball her whole life and is very athletic. She recently moved to the island and was in a gym and wanted to get help on a piece of equipment. The trainer there wouldn't help her, so she asked me if I had any online videos or subscription-based resources she could take to the gym. I said, no, but I'll make one. When people speak up and ask for what they want, it gives these centers, coaches and organizers something to work with.

**Ross**: Not all facilities have the same equipment, and we don't have as many participants as mainstream programs. For example, there’s probably a mainstream basketball program at every recreation center in a city but a wheelchair basketball program may only be offered at one location because of the number of people that are registered, which means the chairs will only be at one location. The first step is to ask questions. Maybe you’re at one rec center, but this equipment is only available at another because it's based on program, but if it's based on general access within a fitness center, there’s a good chance that having a conversation might allow something to be brought in. What’s becoming more common now within municipalities having specific people or teams that focus on accessibility and inclusion. If the rec center staff don’t know the answer, your next question can be: does your municipality have somebody that specifically works with access, inclusion, and adaptive programs? If that doesn't work, visit the website. do some more research or go to a community organization because they may have the answer and may have the contacts and equipment that can be brought into a facility. The good thing is that we're building this network, and today is a good example of how strong that network can be.

**Dannielle**: I know that there are several community centers, for instance, Creekside and the False Creek Community Center, that do have equipment. Is there any way we can get some of the university students studying kinesiology or studying to be a physiotherapist to help people with disabilities use some of this equipment, like a rowing machine or anything to strengthen their muscles? I know that university students get credit towards their degree if they put in a certain number of volunteer hours. This way, they'll be able to work with a person who has a disability to further their degree requirements. I’ve spoken to the people down at Creekside couple of years ago, and they were all for it. We were going to go through the Parks Department and the community center, but all that kind of fell apart. Maybe now is the time.

**Megan**: I think that's a great idea. The course we offer is for credit but it's not for university credit. It's for kinesiology credit, and personal training credit. I wouldn't know who to talk to about that but I'm going to make a note and think about it. That would give people more opportunities to go to those rec centers and volunteer.

**Eric**: We've talked a lot about equipment, staff and facilities, but a big challenge to getting out there is accessible transportation. The question is just asking for any tips, and feedback for how can I can make it easier. For example, booking HandyDART is a big challenge. You have to plan ahead which can make working out at the spur of the moment difficult. Are there any tips for how to make getting to a community center or wherever the activities are happening easier, especially if you're taking public transit?

**Ross**: It’s definitely it is a challenge. Typically, if we're hosting programs or events, we try to ensure that they're near public transportation, ideally near a SkyTrain. We know that's not always the solution but at least it’s a step in the right direction. We know the challenges with scheduling and HandyDART, and you have to have some flexibility with the start times, because it doesn't always go according to plan. When we're hosting events from a SportAbility lens, we're bringing people from outside the province who all need accessible transportation so we have to work with TransLink. We had a great experience in Victoria hosting Boccia Nationals in 2019. HandyDART was great to work with and provided all the accessible transportation over the five days, but that's one specific event. The day-to-day is still the challenge and I think it's going be an ongoing conversation, From our end, we have to build in flexibility and work with the individuals to make sure that start and end times are flexible. I think we'll all be part of the conversation going forward to hopefully provide a better solution for accessible transportation.

**Teri**: Unfortunately, transportation is where we're at right now. It's horrendous. I even I have my own vehicle, but just to drive into the city will take an hour. I have been choosing to do everything virtually, obviously, within the last year anyways, but I'll probably continue doing that because it works well for me. Definitely trip planning is really important and I know BC Transit has a great trip planner. If you're going through a sport organization or a community organization to attend an event or a program and transportation is a barrier, reach out to them. You never know, there might be someone in your area, another peer that could pick you up along the way. I know at SCI BC they've had had a few people that they've done that with. If you have any barriers, please reach out to the organizer and say: I really want to attend and this is my problem, do you have any solutions for me?

**Eric**: If you were coming to a center, could you phone ahead and say: I'm a wheelchair user or I have a mobility challenge, could somebody meet me in the parking lot, could one of the staff help with the door to get in or help carry extra equipment? Is it a possibility to call ahead and have somebody in the actual facility meet them outside?

**Teri**: I've called, I’ve asked random strangers quite often in my life to assist. Obviously, we don't want to have to ask for help all the time. It can be really hard for some people. Really, everything should be accessible to everyone, no matter where you live, but that's not where we are at right now.

**Eric**: It can be very difficult to ask for help, especially if you don't know the person but at least that is an option. If you're starting out, and you want to go to a class, on the community center websites, is there a place to get information about accessible equipment?

**Ross**: Website navigation can be a challenge at times. From a City of Surrey perspective, if there is adaptive equipment available at a facility, it is listed on the website. You’ll have to click on some scroll down menus, but you'll get a list of the accessible features of that location. I can't speak to other municipalities, but I’d hope that would be there. In terms of equipment, In terms of access and going to a facility, you definitely can ask for help. Hopefully, the facility has accessible doorways, whether they open automatically, or have the accessible buttons, but you can definitely call ahead and ask a staff member for assistance. I use a wheelchair for mobility and if I'm dropping off equipment as a staff member, I will call ahead and ask for help. It’s a bit easier for me because I have that established relationship, but you as a community member can do the same. Keep in mind that the environment is a bit different right now as we're in the midst of a pandemic so you have to approach it with some sensitivity. For the city of Surrey, we have our attendant policy, which means you can bring somebody with you that you know can provide support for you and they can attend at no cost. Their role is to support you and make sure that you can access recreation. If you have questions about the policy from a City of Surrey perspective, email inclusion@surrey.ca.

**Eric**: Maureen has mentioned in the chat about the Taxi Saver program.

**Maureen**: You can pay $50 a month for $100 of taxi saver coupons. I stock up and usually have quite a few ready.

**Eric**: That could be another resource, and another thing that was listed is the accessibility app Access Now that may provide more information. We're going to switch over to outdoor recreation and just like we did for the indoor, we have responses from the survey. I'm going to start this discussion off with survey responses regarding outdoor recreation. Our survey results showed main barriers in participating in outdoor recreation are reliable transportation, parking, and adequate facilities. Shira, can you speak to what is being done to create more accessible parks and trails in BC?

**Shira**: I’ll start off with my Parks Canada hat on, just to let you know that we're undertaking a big initiative to do assessments and audits of all of our parks and sites across Canada, which is a huge undertaking. We want to get a baseline to see where we're at and where we can make improvements. We're also eagerly anticipating new standards coming out from Accessibility Standards Canada on outdoor spaces and want to ensure that our sites meet those new standards as well as existing standards. It's hard to answer that, generally, but we are definitely trying to ensure that we are meeting all best practices and standards, that places, buildings and trailheads are accessible.

**Eric**: When somebody is heading out to a trail, is there a listing of accessible washrooms, or do they list accessible parking?

**Shira**: That really depends on the agency. At Parks Canada, we're really trying to improve the information on our website. A big part of the enjoyment comes from being able to properly trip-plan and not arrive and have something be very difficult or a barrier pop up. We want to ensure all that information is available. Where are the accessible washrooms? Where's the parking? Where's the best place to go in order for the day to unfold well? I'd really love to hear from people on this call if there’s information that they're looking for that they have a hard time finding so we can incorporate that into our web content strategy. As far as other agencies and municipalities, some are doing a really good job like the City of Surrey. I think contacting municipalities and asking questions, speaking to the folks responsible. That's how these things get done.

**Eric**: There was a question in the chat about CSA standards, and when they’re going to be released.

**Shira**: It's not actually CSA, it's Accessibility Standards, Canada. That's part of a new agency that's come out of the Accessible Canada Act of 2019, but those are in progress and should be released for public comments in early 2022. The public will have an opportunity to provide feedback on the standards that addresses things from parking lots, to picnic tables, trails and any kind of outdoor space, whether it's urban or more of a park space. It would be great to have this group to take a look and provide comments. There will be a 60-day comment period.

**Eric**: One of the comments that has come up is that beaches aren't as accessible as far as mats or picnic tables. What resources are available for people to navigate that more easily?

**Em**: It’s very similar to what came up in the indoor programming conversation. Just ask. No one's going to give you a hard time for asking questions to better your experience. What we do at Power to Be is send our staff ahead of time any time we're going out into the community. Our staff know the folks who are going to be coming on that program and what their mobility needs are, and we have adaptive equipment on hand like TrailRiders and Hippocampe chairs that tolerate rougher terrain. It gets into the equipment loan discussion from the indoor conversation as well. The other thing is in developing trails. We have a site here on the South Island at Prospect Lake and we've developed over five kilometers of somewhat accessible trails that are all usable with our TrailRider. They're a reasonable grade of hills, switchbacks have been built in and we've leaned really heavily on volunteers to help with these sorts of projects, as well as with the running of our programs with that specialized equipment. You know, folks, were speaking about training in the first half of this conversation, and that's a huge, key piece for us, too. Making sure that folks who are coming to support have that training and the knowledge of the specialized equipment to get onto those more technical trails. I would sum it up by just saying ask folks who have been to these places before, reach out to your municipal office, or whoever is the governing body of that area and see what information you can get about what accessible really means. As we know sometimes, it says it's accessible and you show up and there's still some barrier there. I would say reach out ask, explore with a backup plan in mind and really lean on the community that's around to help explore those places.

**Eric**: I wanted to ask a follow up for people who may be hearing these terms for the first time. You talked about different wheelchairs, can you describe them and the differences and what some of the options are?

**Em**: A TrailRider is a brand of all terrain wheelchair and is my personal favorite. I’ve had some really special experiences with folks who are using it but it's essentially a wheelchair with a single wheelbarrow wheel and a rickshaws chair of sorts, where you have a person in the back with a disc brake, much like you would see on a mountain bike, as well as someone in the front with handles. Some folks did an expedition to Mount Everest base camp with a TrailRider, so I'm not kidding there are tons of places that these things can go with the right group of people on board to help out. The Hippocampe chairs have really thick wheels that are great for beaches and are actually the rubber inside wheels of a 747 jet. The Hippocampe has a T-shaped, hammock seat where your feet are pointing out in front toward one wheel, which is adaptable to be a ski if you're in snow. I just really encourage folks to check out this equipment. It comes with a financial conversation as well. They are often expensive, but there are grants and loan libraries out there, so check in with your local community organizations and see what's available.

**Eric**: Hopefully many people on this chat are familiar with the TrailRider because it's part of BCMOS, which is a society affiliated with the Disability Foundation. Could you talk a bit about the amount of preparation time that goes into the more adventurous activities with Power to Be? Or if you were to try out Power to Be for the first time, what's a good way to get started for beginners or what's possible?

**Em**: We build up to what folks need and we will meet people where they're at. If you want to come and try on a climbing harness and see how that feels, that's great. It doesn’t matter if you don't get on the wall or don't climb all the way to the top. You came out and tried something new and we would celebrate that. We've also taken trail riders on overnight trips in Strathcona Park in the mountains because someone came to us and said: I want to do this. Many of our programs come from someone asking us if we can make this happen and us figuring out a way to do it or something similar. What I would say to folks looking to get involved with Power to Be is participate in our Have a Go days. We did push pause on them during the pandemic because they were larger groups than we were allowed. We really turned our focus inwards on the participants that are a part of our more regularly scheduled programming, as well as those who are needing support at this time. Emily will be sending out contact information for Victoria and Vancouver Power to Be offices. You can reach out to either office and we will be in touch with how to get connected or come have a go!

**Eric**: I just want to expand a bit, because these are questions that we get asked. If you go to Power to Be and you find out that you're really excellent at kayaking and you realize that you'd like to do this competitively, can Power to Be connect you to another club? Do you assist people that have started out for leisure and then decide they want to advance to more competitive sport? Is that an option as well?

**Em**: It's definitely an option. We're really connected to other organizations that do similar things and work with similar folks in the community. We could absolutely connect you with organizations like Sport for Life, or OneAbility up at UVic that have some great sport programs. What I have found in the outdoor realm is that folks are coming to access nature, to have leisure time and recreation time. They’re really looking for ways to get out independently and move on from Power to Be and be able to go kayaking without needing our support. That ideal journey for folks coming to Power to Be is trying it out, learning that they like it, getting the skill set down and being able to go and do it independently without our support and do it elsewhere in the community. As much as we hate to say goodbye to people who we've supported for a long time, it is our goal that we can help folks be more independent. As we've seen from the survey results, accessing these resources seems to be really difficult for people. So if we can create that access and give you those skills, then you're really set up to be independent, doing something in nature that you love to do.

**Eric**: How have you seen recreation change during the time of COVID-19? How do you think it will continue to change?

**Shira**: Parks Canada and BC Parks and other places have been way busier. For example, our accessible campsites are super busy. We have something called oTENTik, which is an accessible cabin that you can stay in. We have a lot of first-time visitors that are coming to our places, which I think is a really great trend that hopefully continues. From our perspective, we want to support independent experiences and allow people to come and explore. We try to give them as much information as we can. We're just saying, here's what we have and you decide if that's going to be good for you, whether you're going to go on a trail rider or you're going to use other equipment. It's just really important that we're open and transparent about our offer.

**Megan**: From a coaching standpoint, COVID and the lockdown made things quite busy. I lead one of the programs through BCMOS, their online Thursday ConnecTra workout, and attendance increased by a lot. Some of the other women that are working with Ocean Rehab and Fitness are finding that they're able to take on a lot more clients online, and even people who live in more remote places with disabilities are able to have access to fitness when they couldn’t before. The biggest challenge it seems now are just the time zones. The pandemic did break that barrier down and brought fitness into some people's homes, allowing them to stay safe and comfortable, they have no commute and it takes the stress out of their day. That's been really cool to see and I don’t think that these online programs are going anywhere. There are so many awesome online programs that are happening now, lots of dancing yoga, fitness, Zumba. It's really cool and that movement wouldn't have happened if it wasn't for us having to turn to virtual options.

**Em**: Because our programming is based outdoors, when we had to turn and be online; I'll tell you there are only so many nature programs that you can cram into one hour online, but we did it for about a year and a half. We had this group of about five or six people that was a casual drop-in, every Thursday morning for an hour. By the end we had this group of folks who were so connected to each other and the relationships were so much greater. We found that people were kind of sick of their families and the people that they lived with because those were the only people that they had seen for the last long time. Having that mixed group opportunity was a really valuable tool and lifeline for some of those folks who are immunocompromised and not leaving their homes.

**Eric**: Ross, do you want to comment on the changes that you've seen to make recreation safe as we continue to deal with COVID-19?

**Ross**: There was a long break from adaptive recreation because of COVID. Obviously, we follow the provincial health protocols for programming, and as we are approaching programs in the fall, we’ve also taken the opportunity to change. Some programs are going to be offered a bit differently, partly to meet the safety requirements but also to add an element of creativity or enhanced quality. We're looking at bringing partners in more and offering wheelchair basketball, boccia, swimming and skating but we’re going to approach them slightly differently. It's an opportunity for feedback. If the changes are great, then we can build off of it just like with any other program. If they don't work then we have the opportunity to go back and approach it differently for the winter. Whether it's a city recreation program or a provincial sports organization program, I think everybody's approaching programs and events with a different lens. We look forward to people's feedback and if you find you don't have an opportunity to try something, let us know because again, we may be missing a demographic that we're not aware of.

**Eric**: Is there a list of accessible parks that somebody could read about or check out to find what is accessible?

**Shira**: I shared a link in the chat for our accessibility page on Parks Canada that just highlights some experiences across the country, whether it's a historic site or a park. I encourage you to check that out. We're always adding to them as we learn more about each site. We are trying to stay away from the idea of saying this is accessible and this is not, because people's needs are so different. We are focusing on providing the information, so if there's a place you want to go, look on the website and really check it out.

**Eric**: Does Parks Canada do accessible tours of parks if you want it to go and check it out? Is there a ranger that could lead you or tours that you could go on?

**Shira**: One of the great things about working for Parks Canada is the staff. We're always looking for ways to provide better service to visitors. If there’s a group that is interested in something, for example, they want to a guided tour for people with mobility impairments, it's a matter of connecting with us and saying: this is what we want to do, and this is what we need, and we help figure it out. Another thing we often do is partner with other organizations, including Power to Be, to develop customized tours. We’re working on training staff so that if someone shows up with a visual impairment or some other issue, that there's a way of providing a meaningful experience to that person. If there's something in particular that's needed, we can certainly tailor those experiences to the visitor, we just need a bit of a heads up.

**Dannielle**: I know there's like a wooden accessible trail or walkway at Burns Bog and I think there is also one on Vancouver Island, near Long Beach. Is the Parks Department planning to have any more of those throughout Canada or maybe even incorporating some knowledge about edible plants? Maybe having a botanist or a ranger who will know about edible plants or medicinal plants? You might even encourage some of the First Nations, women particularly, to be involved. I know there are many edible mushrooms and greens things that can be used in place of Big Pharma. I'm wondering if the Parks Department has any plans to expand on those programs.

**Shira**: Parks Canada is a really decentralized agency. We have a national office, which supports the different parks and sites to develop accessible experiences, but they're really the ones that will say: we want to do this because it's really appropriate for our site. That being said, we do provide support to them, so if they want to make an accessible experience, we can provide a lot of guidance. I'm often contacted by sites developing these new things, asking for best practices, universal design principles, that kind of stuff. We certainly partner with other landholders, so many First Nations, there's a co-management situation, so they're, of course involved in program development. There are really special Indigenous-led programs across the country that are that are great and really inclusive. I noticed in the chat someone had a question about using universal design principles. Does Parks Canada use professionals that have universal design training? And yes, we do, whether it's in-house staff or consultants, it's a really important part of how we prioritize projects and funding. Accessibility is a big principal, and it’s part of our mandate to provide access to all Canadians. It's first and foremost of the new work we're doing. For example, we have a new program on inclusive washrooms. All new Parks Canada washrooms will be gender-neutral, which means that people with disabilities can have a caregiver of the opposite sex come into the washroom to assist. When we talk about accessibility, we're also talking about inclusion and ensuring that we're trying to meet the needs of all Canadians.

**Sheena**: We are in the fourth wave now, and I feel uncomfortable going on the SkyTrain or on a bus. I have a traumatic brain injury from a car accident that was not my fault. I’m not ready to get back to a rec center in Vancouver. Sports are really good for the mind, body and spirit but I find that singing, is very sad for me, from my own experience, but it's also very joyful.

**Eric**: Everybody needs to do what's right for them and everyone and knows their own body best. Navigating COVID is an ongoing process for us all, and recreation can be many different things. Hopefully you take some resources today, we've talked about online, right? Or even singing, and I know you've collaborated with bands in the past. If you're not ready to travel, or that's a challenge, maybe there are more online opportunities. I know we'll have those, through ConnecTra.

**Sheena**: I connect in another way with bands and also working on writing my own songs. I just mentioned being uncomfortable when I sing with others so I'm going to take a step back.

**Eric**: I wanted to ask about cost for your adventures and specialized adventures. If somebody wants to go rock climbing or do something, what would be considered out of the ordinary? What is the cost involved with that?

**Em**: That answer is going to differ depending on who you ask. At Power to Be, we charge $10 per day program. If it's a full day, we might do $20. If it's an overnight, that price goes up as you have to account for things like food, but really, it's super subsidized. Let’s use rock climbing as an example. If you want it to go bouldering, which is a type of rock climbing that doesn't require a harness, you need to be somewhat able bodied or have upper body strength to do that sport. The cost of buying a harness, the appropriate footwear, and the entrance fee to the gym are going to cost more than $10. What we can do is really subsidize that to make it a lot more accessible. That being said, $10 is sometimes still a big barrier for people, so what we also have at Power to Be is a bursary. A chunk of our budget every year is set aside to cover the fees of day programs, overnights, things like that. We have this bursary and it's available for you to use. We also will bill with organizations or government organizations that cover things. The Autism Funding Unit is a great example in British Columbia, they will pay for x amount of dollars per child per year for certain programs and our programs are approved by AFU. There are similar agencies that you can get involved with if there is specific funding available to your diagnosis which are awesome tools to use to help cut down some of those financial barriers to getting involved in things indoors and outdoors.

**Eric**: Teri, I was just wondering if you could share feedback as far as outdoor recreation. Is there a beach or trail that works better for you or that you would recommend?

**Teri**: I’m pretty lucky I live in Vancouver, so I have a few more options. I think a lot of people I know I'm not really much of a beach goer, but I do know that there are beach mats, and in some places beach chairs available. If you're interested in skiing opportunities, there are different types of skiing and lots of organizations that provide access to downhill and cross-country skiing, and snowboarding. I've even been camping so I have figured it out, I've used the TrailRiders. They're pretty awesome and it's really cool to be able to get to places you never thought were accessible to you. There are lots of volunteers that help out, and their passion for helping really makes it exciting. I was kind of against the TrailRider for a while, but everybody's passion for it and excitement, and being able to get up into these crazy places is pretty cool to experience. Reach out and the opportunities are endless. Reach out to your people and find out what's available. I don't know if anybody has children in their life, but most of them are family-friendly, especially the outdoor stuff. I bring my son with me pretty much everywhere. He can bring his bike sometimes, and we can go on camping trips together. We've done hikes together before, and we’ve skied, but he doesn't really love skiing.

**Eric**: I saw on the chat a question about accessible cabins. If you're not ready to go into a tent, like personally, myself, are there any experiences that people could recommend as far as accessible cabins?

**Shira**: At the Maple Bay Cabins on Cultus Lake, the whole site was designed to be fully accessible. There are accessible showers, clothes washing, there's power in the cabins. The challenge is of course, to reserve that. I mentioned earlier at Parks Canada, we have something called an oTENTik, which is a canvas sided cabin that has all the things you would need. There's a bed, a stove, indoor table, and a table and chairs inside. It has everything, you just need to bring your own bedding.

**Em**: There are some people that are tent people and there are some people that are cabin people, and I don't dispute that, but if you think that you're a cabin person, because a tent seems crazy for someone in your situation is as an individual, I would rethink it a little bit before you're like oh no, I'm a cabin person. You might be, and that's fine, the indoors is great too, but I've had folks who are wheelchair users who camp in a tent. We set up a cot and there are camping cots you can get that are quite a way off the ground so you're not just sleeping on the ground if getting up and down is the barrier. If you're looking to get outside and do an overnight whether it’s in a cabin, in a tent or just under the stars there are tons of options for sleeping arrangements and camping equipment that you can adapt to your needs. I also always say to students that I teach that my favorite pieces of adaptive equipment are a roll of duct tape and a pool noodle. You can do so much with just your imagination and the right pieces of equipment, so don't sell yourself short.

**Teri**: I'm not an outdoors person really at all. A hotel; that's my camping style. I do have to say that I went on a trip with Power to Be and they introduced me to camping and I quite enjoyed it. The accessibility around campgrounds can sometimes be challenging in itself. I ended up buying a tent and I have a blow-up bed that’s the same height as my wheelchair so I can transfer completely level, and it's queen size. I also hate the cold but I have a heated jacket, I wear a toque, I bring so many blankets and pillows. It's glamping for sure, it's amazing. I found that a tent that I could roll into and it's got two rooms and it's super easy to put up. I don't put it up but I go with people that can help me. Reach out to your peers and people that you know that can offer you advice.

**Eric**: I just wanted to mention that lots of people use the discussion groups available through SCI BC to ask peoples’ opinions and exchange ideas. Ross, I wanted to give you an opportunity to talk about anything that the City of Surrey has done to make outdoor recreation more affordable and more accessible.

**Ross**: The focus in the past few years has been on new builds. I know with work with the Rick Hansen Foundation, there are audits that have happened for existing builds that have morphed into the audits for the new builds that need to meet that gold standard. Wherever the location, you want it to be accessible for everyone. If people have feedback, they can do so on the on the subsidy side, I know that a lot of municipalities have different subsidies available for persons with disabilities and also for supporting the financial aspect of it, so it's definitely something that has been talked about, and is in the works. Hopefully, there will be something available in the coming months and it's something that's piloted and tested and continues to evolve over time.

**Eric**: If I was to go to the City of Surrey website or get a list of beaches, could I get a listing of what might be available at certain beaches?

**Ross**: I don't know the answer to that question, so I will certainly look into that further.

**Kim**: Several years ago, Marnie and I created a group called South Fraser Active Living. It started when we were looking for a yoga class close to our home. Even though Megan and ICORD and the whole Blusson building and PARC is great, we want to advocate for services closer to our own community. Not everyone can travel from city to city and we should be allowed to get in and use equipment just like everyone else. We believe in access for all people everywhere. Ross, I don't know the answer offhand, but I've heard about the beach mats many times, and there are beach chairs in Semiahmoo as well. I am so impressed with the website that the City of Surrey has developed in the past few years. We've checked out many other websites throughout the province and I would say by far the City of Surrey’s is the best. There's so much detail as far as parks, recreation, and for people like myself who have limited mobility and their arms hands, all the recreation centers now have a package of hand grips that can be borrowed. There are other kinds of tools in that toolkit as well, depending on your disability or abilities. If you look at the website, it's quite descriptive. There's even a section of adaptable fit programs in their Recreation Guide, which comes out every spring, winter and fall. Also, the equipment is pretty amazing and there is more equipment at the gyms in Cloverdale and Newton. Partnering with people like Megan, and UBC.

**Eric**: I also wanted to mention when it comes to accessible cabins, there is Agur Lake as well, in the Okanagan area. We had a cabin camping event through BCMOS a couple years ago. The cabins are accessible and I think they hold up to six people. I just want to thank everybody for sharing and giving their feedback. Shira, one of the questions that came up was the challenge for people in keeping their balance when the ground is uneven. When you're designing parks, does footing come into play? Are there any suggestions?

**Shira**: If we take universal design principles to heart, we try to minimize those kinds of situations. Any new sites that we're developing, we consider footing to be important as part of the design. The challenge is there's so many sites in places that were built years ago before these more modern standards. It's just taking a lot of time for catch up in order to improve them. As we move forward, we are ensuring that trails and places that are available are accessible to more people.

**Eric**: I have found this such an informative day. I want to thank our panelists. We've covered a lot of information, wider topics than I even imagined. One of the messages that I'll take away from today that seemed to be repeated over and over again is: if you have a need, ask, don't be afraid to bring it up at community centers. Don't be afraid to say what you need. Em said it best. Don't limit yourself either, you might be a tent person. If you're a glamping person, that's okay too, but don't put limits on what you want to experience. Don't be afraid to ask, there is a network out there. I would be remiss if I didn't say it, and Emily, thank you for putting it in the chat, the Tetra Society does assistive devices, so if you're doing recreation, and you need something modified, maybe they can help you. In closing, I want to mention that everything that was shared here is going to be posted and emailed out to attendees, and there's going to be a summary of findings within the next week. ConnecTra, is a safe space to share your ideas and we always welcome your feedback. Any follow up questions, concerns or ideas for the future, you can email to echambers@connectra.org. I believe the emails of the of the panelists are going to be posted as well. Continue to check out various events that are happening through ConnecTra. Of course, you yourselves are a great resource for us, so if you know of anything that's happening out there, let ConnecTra know. Emily does a great job of putting these together, and it's been great with our phenomenal panelists. On behalf of the Disability Foundation, ConnecTra, and myself, I want to say thank you.