



University  
of Victoria

# CanAssist Impact Report 2015–16

Helping people with  
disabilities improve their  
independence and quality of life

Creating extraordinary  
learning opportunities

Making a vital impact in the community

Building an inclusive society



## OUR VISION

In partnership with the disability and academic communities, CanAssist will be recognized as a global leader in developing technologies, programs and services that contribute to a truly inclusive society, where everyone has the opportunity to participate and contribute.

## OUR VALUES

Innovation  
Client focus  
Passion  
Accountability

## OUR MISSION

CanAssist collaborates with the community to develop and deliver innovative customized technologies, programs and services that improve the quality of life of people living with disabilities, while at the same time providing students and faculty at the University of Victoria with rich and meaningful opportunities for education and research.

Davin, who has motor control challenges, recently received a recumbent trike that allows her to ride safely and comfortably in her Delta BC community.



*"The trike is so awesome! I love it! It's so stable and I feel so safe when using it. I am very thankful to CanAssist."*

**Davin**

TeenWork, CanAssist's youth employment program, helped Marcel find part-time employment at Red Barn Market while he's still in high school. TeenWork helps youth with disabilities transition to adulthood by achieving workplace success.



*"My TeenWork coach helped me focus my job search on businesses that match up with my personal values so that I would be happier over the long term at work."*

**Marcel**

FRONT COVER: Aviv received Waveband, a software app that lets her play a huge range of "instruments" simply by moving the iPod Touch attached to her arm.



*"Waveband allows individuals to express themselves musically – often for the first time – through different instruments and sounds."*

**Allan Slade, music therapist  
Victoria Conservatory of Music**

# CANASSIST

## WHO WE ARE

CanAssist is an organization at the University of Victoria with a core team of about 20 professionals, many of whom are engineers or software developers.

## WHAT WE DO

We develop customized technologies and programs for people with disabilities where there are gaps in existing services, while providing meaningful opportunities for student and faculty engagement.

## WHY WE DO IT

CanAssist's work is a reflection of UVic's commitment to making a vital impact in the community, creating extraordinary learning opportunities, promoting inclusion, and raising awareness about disability issues.



## WHO WE HELP

We assist people of all ages and from across the disability spectrum in improving their independence and quality of life, whether their challenge involves a physical, cognitive or mental health barrier.

## HOW WE DO IT

Being part of UVic is fundamental to our sustainability and success. UVic provides CanAssist with direct and indirect support, including the physical space where we work. We also have ready access to UVic's outstanding faculty, students, research facilities and administrative expertise.

## WHAT SETS US APART

CanAssist is unique in North America in being a university organization that develops customized technologies for clients with disabilities in the community. Clients and their families are not charged for technologies; instead CanAssist seeks funding through charitable donations, grants and service agreements with other organizations.



# CARSA

## CanAssist's first year in CARSA



For the first time, CanAssist has a place to showcase some of its amazing technologies for visitors. The Interactive Technology Zone, located in CanAssist's front lobby, was made possible through a grant from the Djavad Mowafaghian Foundation. Several members of the Foundation recently visited CanAssist.

In spring 2015, CanAssist staff members packed up their offices and engineering equipment and moved into UVic's Centre for Athletics, Recreation and Special Abilities (CARSA). One year later, CanAssist has realized many extraordinary benefits from being located at the front entrance of this beautiful new facility, which is shared with Vikes Athletics and Recreation, including:

- improved awareness of the CanAssist program on campus and in the community;
- stronger research and education partnerships on campus;
- a home for the new Interactive Technology Zone in CanAssist's lobby;
- increased opportunities to partner with Vikes Athletics and Recreation to develop and promote inclusive programs;
- a state-of-the-art machine shop; and
- bright, spacious new offices and labs.

Alyshia is a participant in TeenWork, CanAssist's highly successful youth employment program. Now a first-year student at UVic, she works part-time as a Vikes Membership Services Representative. "I honestly don't know what I would have done without TeenWork," says Alyshia, who sometimes visits her TeenWork job coaches before her shifts at CARSA.



## Message from the outgoing Chair of CanAssist's Advisory Board

As I reflect on my association with CanAssist over the years, it is wonderful to realize just how far this organization has come and what a very positive impact its work is having on so many people living with disabilities, as well as their families. In recent years, CanAssist has built a solid foundation on which to grow, a record of excellence, and a high level of respect on campus and in the wider community. UVic's commitment to CanAssist and disability issues is reflected in CanAssist's location in the new CARSA facility. In fact, the first year in CARSA has provided a tremendous boost to CanAssist's profile and has only strengthened the organization's ability to contribute on campus, in the community, across the province and beyond.



**Dr. Catherine A. Mateer**  
Chair of CanAssist's Advisory Board and  
UVic's Associate Vice-President Academic Planning



## CanAssist welcomes incoming Chair

CanAssist is delighted to welcome Dr. Nancy Wright, whose new position as UVic's incoming Associate Vice-President Academic Planning will include the role of chairing CanAssist's Advisory Board. Dr. Wright holds a BA and MA from York University and a MPhil and PhD from Yale University. As an inter-disciplinary scholar of literature, law and history, she has more than 25 years' teaching, research and administrative experience in Canada, Australia and the US. CanAssist is excited to begin working with Dr. Wright during 2016-17.

## Message from CanAssist's Executive Director

CanAssist is always looking for ways to increase its impact among people who face a wide range of barriers. Heading into fiscal 2016-17, CanAssist has identified three key goals designed to further extend this impact. The first is our ongoing focus on developing "broad-impact" technologies, which are designed to help many people who face similar challenges. The second is our plan to venture beyond BC by forming strategic partnerships across the country. While we will continue to strengthen our impact in BC, we will also work to make a positive difference on a national scale. Finally, we aim to step up our activities here at UVic by formalizing more partnerships with faculty and research groups, while always looking for opportunities for increased and meaningful student engagement.



**Robin Syme**  
Executive Director  
CanAssist at the University of Victoria

# CanAssist's Technology Development Program

# PROGRAMS



Colin lives in a care facility in Kamloops. As his condition has continued to deteriorate, Colin has almost no movement in his limbs, severely restricting his ability to participate independently in activities. So CanAssist provided a device that allows him to control his TV and DVD player by blowing air into a plastic straw, and to control an iPad by sipping air out of the same straw.

*"Colin is isolated in his room with very little social time. Therefore he is going to enjoy this device – the impact is huge for him."*

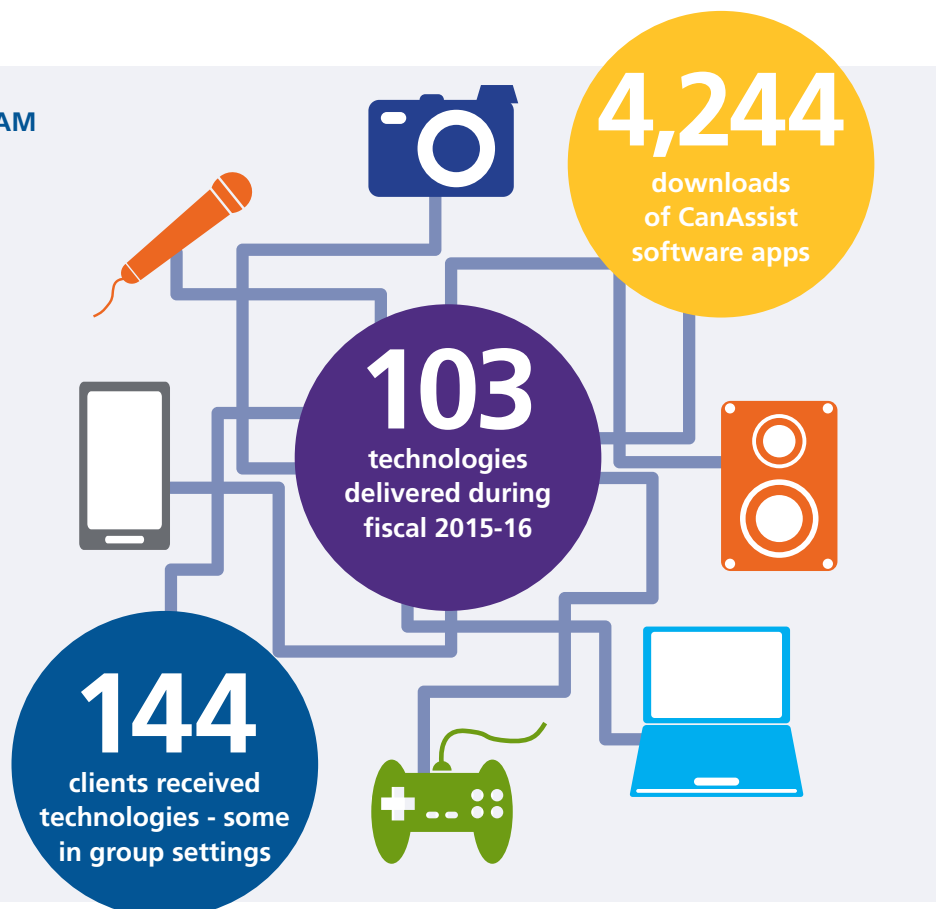
*Colin's mother, Doreen*

## TECHNOLOGY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM

CanAssist's primary activity is the development of innovative yet practical customized technologies for people with disabilities.

Our team of engineers and software developers takes on projects in response to requests from individuals and organizations where no viable commercial solution exists.

Sometimes a device that has been developed for an individual has the potential to help many more people with similar needs. Such technologies provide excellent opportunities for CanAssist to ensure ongoing sustainability, while meeting our goal to reach ever-larger numbers of people.





Following a stroke, Joe's gait became unsteady. So CanAssist attached a wireless sensor to his lower leg and a smartphone to his walker. Together, they alert Joe when he starts to shuffle and remind him to take longer strides.



*"It was fantastic to see Joe walk down the hall by himself without requiring constant prompts from his caregiver."*

**Carl Spani, CanAssist engineer**

The Spinner was delivered to 50 classrooms across BC for students with very challenging disabilities. The device teaches kids how to use an "accessibility switch," a skill that is critical in enabling them to independently control a wide range of electronic devices.



*"Using an accessibility switch is a starting point in participating – it's a way into the child's world and a way for students to be active participants in the classroom."*

**Chris Jenkins  
Coordinator, Inclusion Outreach**

CanAssist worked with the Victoria Conservatory of Music to develop a unique music therapy kit that enables people who can't use standard instruments to create music independently.



*"The kit's adaptability for participants' needs is absolutely remarkable and outstanding. It will assist participants to achieve new therapeutic goals."*

**Johanne Brodeur  
Head of VCM Music Therapy**

Josh found it difficult to participate in video gaming because standard controllers require the use of two hands. The Accessible Gaming Controller lets him play with others independently.



*"This is awesome – it gets a 10 out of 10! My brother is going to get wrecked when I use my new system!"*

**Josh, age 10**

Paul, who lives in a group home for people with brain injury, received an Accessible Remote Control, which operates with as few as two buttons and can be expanded to include additional features.



*"This will make a great difference to Paul's life as it provides him with a degree of independence rather than having to constantly seek help from staff."*

**Paul's father, Patrick**

Garth was an avid guitarist for more than 30 years, but a stroke brought an end to his playing. With CanAssist's Foot-Operated Guitar Strummer, Garth can control both strumming and the position of the pick using only his left foot.



*"Garth is just beaming! He has not been able to pick up a guitar in over a year, let alone play one.... But today he played and sang an entire Beatles song. Incredible!"*

**Flannery Brown  
Occupational Therapist, Hope BC**

## CanAssist's Academic Engagement Program

# PROGRAMS

**4,842**

hours worked by co-op, work study, volunteer and international students

**723**

students engaged in CanAssist activities during fiscal 2015-16

UVic and CanAssist recognize the importance of giving students, faculty and staff opportunities to support and interact with people who face a wide range of barriers and to learn about disability issues. As students, in particular, assume leadership positions in society, those who have had such experiences are likely to support increased inclusion and accessibility.

To date, several thousand students from virtually every discipline have been provided with rewarding learning opportunities through their participation in CanAssist activities. Likewise, many UVic faculty members, representing numerous departments, have connected with CanAssist through research partnerships, classroom activities, and an ongoing sharing of ideas and expertise.

UVic engineering student Miles Long-Alexander developed a custom Canoe Paddle Support during his co-op term at CanAssist. The device allows people with a range of disabilities the chance to participate in group canoe trips. Created for Power To Be – a charitable organization that provides accessible outdoor programs to families in Victoria and Vancouver – the device is expected to be used by many people in the years to come.



*"CanAssist has been a great experience for me since designing technologies and working in a machine shop are both huge passions of mine. Knowing that my work is having a positive impact on people's lives and that I've gained a better understanding of disabilities along the way has made the experience that much better."*

*Miles Long-Alexander  
4th year Mechanical Engineering*



# PROGRAMS

## CanAssist's TeenWork Youth Employment Program

**36**  
youth assisted through TeenWork this fiscal year

TeenWork is CanAssist's innovative youth employment program, which is designed to help youth with disabilities find and retain meaningful, part-time paid employment while they attend high school. TeenWork was developed with the aim of filling a gap in the employment field for youth with disabilities as they begin to transition to adulthood.

Each participant is screened for work readiness and brings a unique skill set and the potential for growth to his or her workplace. A TeenWork job coach provides non-time-limited, on-site job coaching, and supports every teen in working toward complete workplace independence. During fiscal 2015-16, TeenWork boasted an amazing 96-per-cent success rate for participants finding paid employment.



Hailey began working for Winners on a casual basis during the Christmas rush and then got hired as a part-time cashier.

*"Hailey has developed new skills and independence. Her managers appreciate her upbeat attitude and dedication."*

*Lauren King  
TeenWork Job Coach*

Andrew, known for his positive attitude at Superstore's seafood department, is increasingly independent as he takes on more responsibilities.



*"Andrew is always reliable, communicates any problems he encounters and works extremely well with others."*

*Todd Sloan  
Superstore Department Manager*

Working at Sidney Bakery has been a dream job for Samara, who loves creating delicious goodies and being part of a team.



*"Samara's sense of confidence has exploded! You can see it in the way she walks, the way she carries herself and how she communicates."*

*Pat Dempsey  
Samara's mom*

# FINANCIAL

## CanAssist's Financial Information and Outlook

CanAssist began 2015-16 with \$5.8 million in secured project funding, which enabled the organization to cover annual operating expenses and project costs of \$2.05 million, and to achieve a balanced budget for the fiscal year.

During the year, CanAssist raised \$784,000 from philanthropic sources, which included grants and donations for technologies, the TeenWork program and a co-op endowment. Funding was also secured from fee-for-service contracts and royalties.

CanAssist is deeply grateful for the contributions of its numerous partners and donors and for its ongoing relationship with each of them. CanAssist's work is entirely dependent on these generous investments, in addition to critical in-kind support from the University of Victoria.

UVic's ongoing in-kind contribution includes providing CanAssist with a state-of-the-art facility and many overhead requirements, such as utilities, security, specialized equipment, and legal, financial and janitorial services – to name just a few. UVic's tremendous support allows virtually all CanAssist revenue to be devoted to supporting clients with disabilities.

In terms of its technology development program, CanAssist had a productive year, with 103 technologies delivered, more than 4,200 software apps downloaded, and many projects in progress and scheduled for completion during 2016-17. Some of these technologies are planned for broad distribution across British Columbia.

enhancing existing partnerships in BC and developing new ones both provincially and nationally, as well as providing staff with opportunities to develop new skills.

This year will provide new learning opportunities for the organization as it implements technology identification and product development processes associated with the design of broad-impact technologies that have the potential to benefit many individuals. This new work will include exploring partnership opportunities for the production, marketing and distribution of these technologies.

The development of broad-impact technologies is an important strategy in ensuring CanAssist's long-term sustainability. In support of its sustainability plan, CanAssist is also undertaking the creation of a three-year strategic plan, which will be shared with partners, donors and others by the end of 2016.



**Broad-impact technologies have the potential to benefit many people with similar needs**

### Looking ahead to fiscal 2016-17

CanAssist began 2016-17 with \$4.4 million in secured project funding and is striving to break even or incur a modest positive balance for the year, based on an approved budget of \$2.2 million.

CanAssist looks forward to 2016-17 and the promise of

*PHOTO: A Single-Handed Chopper is improving independence in the kitchen for Nils, who had a stroke. The device keeps food items securely in place and allows cutting with many types of knives. Developed for several clients, this device has potential for broader distribution to people with similar needs across the province.*

# GIVING

## Donor Spotlight

When he was a little boy, James was fascinated by garbage trucks. On collection day he watched at the window and ran out to help the waste collectors load the truck.

Now 18, James is a friendly, easy-going teen, who loves bowling, biking and meeting new people. But he was finding it difficult to get a part-time job that matched his personality and skill set. So last year, he joined TeenWork, the CanAssist program that changes the life path of young people with disabilities by helping them find and retain part-time employment.

With ongoing support from his TeenWork job coaches, James created resumes, practised interview skills and spoke with local employers. TeenWork helps young people build the confidence and life skills they need for their future as working adults. But it wouldn't be possible without the generous donors who fund TeenWork.

## Coast Capital provides ongoing support

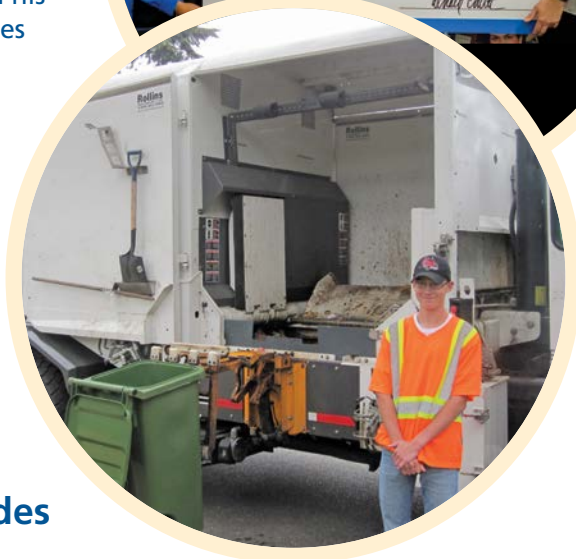
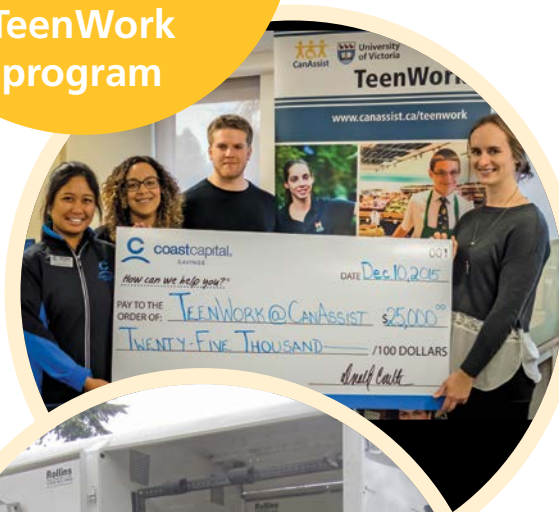
One of those funders, Coast Capital Savings, has given more than \$120,000 to the program since 2010, almost as long as TeenWork has been operating. This consistent support has allowed

CanAssist to hire qualified staff to serve the approximately 30 youth participating in the program at any given time. Coast Capital's

Island Youth Get It

Community Council, a group of eight emerging young leaders, made the funding decision. The credit union's innovative

*Linley (far left in photo) tours CanAssist and delivers a cheque for the TeenWork program*



Linley Faulkner, chair of the Vancouver Island Youth Get It Community Council, was one of the council members who chose to award a grant to CanAssist again.

"As a UVic alumna, I was aware of CanAssist, but I didn't know the range and depth of their programs," she says. Linley took a tour of CanAssist's offices and labs when she delivered a cheque for \$25,000. "I learned about the many social and technical innovations at CanAssist, and how they make such a huge difference to people's lives."

## Contributing to the community

Linley explains that the alignment between the work that CanAssist does and Coast Capital's community promise was a key deciding factor. "Coast Capital's community promise is to help build a richer future for youth in our community," explains Linley. "One of the pillars of that promise focuses on financial empowerment for young people. CanAssist ticks all the boxes in terms of what we look for in the groups we support and we are happy to hear that Coast Capital's funding is making a real difference through CanAssist's work."

This year James landed his dream job working as a waste collector in his neighbourhood. Thanks to Coast Capital Savings, that little boy who watched garbage trucks is now firmly on a journey to becoming a confident and increasingly independent adult.

program empowers the young people who serve on the council to develop their community leadership skills through allocating Coast Capital's community dollars.



The following is a list of key partners and donors that provided support to CanAssist during fiscal 2015-16, whether through charitable donations, fee-for-service work or other means. CanAssist is grateful to these organizations for their generosity and vision.



For a complete list of donors and partners, please visit [www.canassist.ca](http://www.canassist.ca).



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