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Winter 2024 Edition Newsletter

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On behalf of the staff and volunteers of the Victoria Disability Resource Centre, we wanted to wish you and your loved ones a very happy New Years!

Here's to 2024 being a year that brings the persons with disabilities community that much closer towards a more accessible and inclusive world!

\*\* Winter Wilderness Impacts Persons with Disabilities ()

There's a long-standing belief that, when it comes to winter weather, the west coast of Canada has it pretty easy. Certainly, based on empirical data alone, it would seem there is some truth to that belief. According to \*\* World Weather Online (<https://www.worldweatheronline.com/victoria-weather-averages/british-columbia/ca.aspx>)

, Victoria receives an average snowfall of 5.4 inches, far below the average of cities in other provinces, such as Edmonton (17.8 inches) or Saskatoon (16.81 inches). We are even lower than some of the cities in our own province, with places like Kelowna receiving 35.91 inches and Prince George receiving a whopping 51.18 inches. With average temperatures to match, rarely dipping a few degrees below zero, one could argue that Victoria's winters are not that big of a deal. However, what the data fails to show is just how much of an impact even a few measly inches of snow can have on a person's daily life. If that person happens to identify as having some form of a disability, that impact has the potential to be much bigger.

For this article, we reached out to members of the persons with disabilities community and asked for their feedback on how Victoria's winter weather affects them, with regards to their disability, and how they would go about handling any obstacles that a few inches of snow and ice may cause. We were lucky enough to have a fairly big response, over 40 people sharing their stories of experiencing Victoria's winter weather conditions! Pretty much all of them say the exact same thing; when winter hits, it brings with it a whole host of challenges that can affect a person both physically and mentally, effectively bringing everyday life to a screeching halt.

"When there is snow, I can't go outside until it's all gone," says Daniel Sands. "Even if it's shoveled, it's often impossible to go where I want without impediments. Even the smallest amount of snow or ice stops my small front wheels of my manual wheelchair."

This was a sentiment echoed by pretty much every person who offered feedback that identified themselves as having a physical disability and using any kind of mobility device, whether it be wheelchair or walker. Any amount of snow or ice makes traversing outside extremely difficult and will most likely lead to the person staying inside.

Petra Blondeau says, "Tend to not venture out much [sic] ice makes it very difficult to get around with mobility aid's [sic]; crutches, canes, walkers." Says one anonymous person, "I stay indoors when there is any chance of slipping. I have a mobility scooter this year but that won't help in ice conditions."

Slipping and falling on ice is a very common concern, especially for those who use walkers or crutches. One anonymous person says, "If it's icy outside, I don't go out. I've had bad slips and falls on ice and it's not worth it. My mother broke her hip slipping and falling in ice...I do not want the same fate." Another says, "Snow and ice on the ground make walking with crutches significantly more difficult and dangerous even if sidewalks have been cleared."

Conditions like these mean that persons with mobility disabilities rely on others to clear away sidewalks and other accessible paths, something that is not always done accurately, if at all.

“Some folks are good about clearing their sidewalk and others just allow the snow to be compressed into ice,” says one senior. “There is often a build up of snow at the corners and crosswalks can also be slippery.” According to Heather Nelson, this lack of proper snow clearing can lead to issues with taking public transport. “Bus stops are rarely ever shoveled and if they are, they are rarely ever shoveled with a large enough area for a wheelchair.”

Chris raises a very troubling scenario for anyone who relies on the assistance of caregivers, “Sometimes snow means my caregiving staff cannot make it in and then I am stranded in bed or at home or trying to get to bed.” Another source highlights what they have to deal with when they require supplies. “I usually end up housebound when it snows or is icy outside. This means that I can’t get out to purchase essentials like groceries and prescriptions. I have to either rely on friends, family or volunteers to pick up and deliver or purchase online and pay for delivery. This can be difficult on a limited budget.”

Snowy and icy conditions can also pose some notable challenges to people who are blind or have low vision. Elizabeth Lalonde, Executive Director for the Pacific Training Centre for the Blind states, “For a blind person like me, detecting hazards becomes even more difficult. I’ve experienced falls on icy surfaces, and distinguishing between sidewalk and road and navigating snowy mounds using a long white cane is also tricky.” She also mentions that using a guide dog in the snow is possible, but can still be difficult, not to mention needing to ensure the animal is properly protected from the cold.

People who are deaf or are hard of hearing also run into their own roadblocks in winter, such as with communication. Gloves and mittens may limit someone’s ability to use sign language and scarves or other face coverings can get in the way of speaking clearly or allowing for lipreading.

Something that came up very frequently in the feedback is how the colder temperatures can aggravate many chronic health conditions, causing excessive pain. Nick says that the cold temperatures can affect his Livedoid Vasculopathy, “My ankles have to stay warm all the time otherwise my skin starts to infarct very painfully! It’s a real curse.” Another anonymous source says, “I absolutely love cooler weather, but it makes my erythromelalgia worse so walking at all outside of my home causes incredible

burning pain on my legs and feet.” The cold can be detrimental even without snow and ice, according to Amber Dawn Tonsi, “Rain brings triggers for flare-ups, migraines, and I get soaked because I cannot use an umbrella with my mobility aids.”

“I usually end up housebound when it snows or is icy outside. This means that I can’t get out to purchase essentials like groceries and prescriptions.”

- Anonymous

Taking in all of these complications, it should come to little surprise that another frequent comment in the feedback is how the winter weather can have a negative impact on mental health. Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD) is a very common occurrence, in which the colder temperatures and darker days of the season can lower a person’s energy levels and dampen their spirits. SAD can affect anybody, regardless of them having a disability or not. Persons with disabilities already live lives that come with obstacles, so to have to experience long stretches of time every winter where said obstacles are tenfold and even the act of leaving the house can be near impossible, it can be incredibly frustrating and depressing. Jennifer Deakin says, “The early dark and the grey from the winter/fall season tends to affect my mental health by increasing depression and decreasing energy and motivation.” Another source adds, “Staying home all day is hard on my mental health.”

So, with all these barriers that people with disabilities face every winter, what can they do to help keep themselves safe and warm? When we asked for feedback, we specifically asked what techniques people have come up with to combat the cold temperatures and frozen obstacles that they encounter. While a few concede that the best course of action is to stay indoors whenever possible, many offer some rather clever solutions for venturing out into the winter wilderness, ensuring that their personal care needs can still be met with a positive attitude.

There are many different options for dressing to keep yourself adequately warm when you’re out in the cold. AJ Wasserman says, “I just got compression gloves which are amazing, I can feel my fingers! Thick wool socks from places like MEC for winter hiking are also good for keeping feet warm. Wind breaker over some sweaters is the best way I’ve found to keep the chill out.” One source suggests using a set of Yaktrax, special snow and ice cleats that fit on to your footwear, while Elizabeth Lalonde suggests a similar product called Crampons. “I wrap legs and feet in 4x

layers of fleece fabric when in my chair outside,” says another source, while also recommending neck coverings and ear muffs.

If you have access to the proper resources, there are modifications that can be done to your mobility devices that may enable more comfortable movement across snow and ice. Matthew Ford says, “I purchased another set of tires for my powerchair (foam filled, not air) and I put metal studs in them, to stop my chair from sliding sideways when going along a sidewalk and someone's driveway makes the sidewalk tip over.” He was kind enough to send us a photo of what these tires look like:

One person says, “If you walk with Cane or Crutches, have an ice grip attachment for the foot of the cane or crutch.”

Relying on others for assistance is a daily occurrence for many persons with disabilities and overcoming winter obstacles is no different. Many people stated that they depend on neighbours, family members, or friends to help with clearing away snow and ice from driveways and sidewalks, picking up food and other necessities, or accompanying them if going out is required. Some also utilize delivery services in order to get their groceries, supplies or medication.

For those who typically use public transit to get around, accessing bus stops may be tricky, as indicated in earlier comments. People have also mentioned that parking their own vehicles can be difficult, as accessible parking spaces often get filled with plowed snow. Making use of taxi services when it snows is another frequently mentioned suggestion. Says Gord, “I use taxis more often as parking at the hospital can be challenging.”

Several feedback comments highlight the importance of advanced preparation. If the local forecast or online weather service indicates that a cold front is due to hit the area soon, stocking up on food, essential supplies and necessities for your personal care could be vital. Chris sums it up best, “Get the things you need to help people help you.” Pre-planning even prior to the onset of winter as much as possible may be a wise move, given how unpredictable weather can be. One source says, “Plan ahead as much as you can. Reach out to any non-profit support services you have available to you to build your support network for emergencies. Stay connected with your neighbors!”

So, what about our mental health? What are some ways in which we can raise our spirits when we are stuck inside and it is cold and dark outside? A common suggestion in the feedback is to remain connected to friends and family. Given how potentially isolating living with a disability can be before bringing winter into the mix, this can be incredibly important. The recent COVID pandemic brought about several options for how someone can maintain social connections while staying indoors, such as Zoom or Discord. These can be especially helpful if the weather is preventing others from coming to visit you in person. Arlene points out how much better it is to maintain these connections through video calls instead of email and texting because it enables you to “see” other people face-to-face. She says, “I did a whole wine tasting for my staff that was completed online along with a painting class - we had a blast.” Marnie suggests a wide range of activities one can do to keep a positive spirit while being snowbound, including reading, watching funny shows, doing something for others, writing, and just being productive. Several people also make use of a SAD lamp, a light source that mimics sunlight.

One source talks about how they are able to get some form of exercise during more treacherous weather conditions, “When I can’t get out for a walk in icy weather, I try to walk the hallways and staircases in my building to get some exercise while listening to something interesting in my headset.”

"Get the things you need to help people help you."

- Chris

While these are all fantastic solutions for how people with disabilities could potentially handle the obstacles of winter weather, there is still the proverbial “elephant in the room” that needs to be touched upon. In the feedback request, we also wanted to know what folks thought the City of Victoria and its officials could do differently in order to help with said winter weather obstacles. The response was almost unanimous: the city needs to do far more than what it is currently doing.

The most common request that was brought up was for the City to be more involved with clearing away snow from sidewalks, bus stops, and curb cuts. According to the \*\* City of Victoria website on Snow Clearing (<https://www.victoria.ca/getting-around/road-maintenance/snow-clearing>)

, current city bylaws put the clearing of sidewalks on business owners and residents, however, as we have highlighted in previous sections of this article, this is not

always done to the proper standards for persons with disabilities. In addition, the website states that residential areas are not as high of a priority for snow removal as downtown businesses and vital services. Multiple comments in the feedback talk about plowed or shoveled snow piled at the edge of a sidewalk and blocking curb cuts or piled along the edge of a bus stop curb, thus preventing a bus from lowering an access ramp. They also talk of accessible parking spaces and loading areas being used for dumping snow. While there is a fine of \$125.00 per day that may be levied if these bylaws are not followed appropriately by business and building owners, many in the feedback feel more should be done to not only enforce them, but to alter the bylaws to bring full accessibility to the forefront. "I believe there should be stricter regulations ensuring prompt and thorough attention to pedestrian pathways, including side roads," says Elizabeth Lalonde. "The focus should extend beyond main areas to benefit pedestrians with disabilities and seniors."

Other suggestions for what the City could put in place include check-in programs for those who may require assistance while stuck inside and more ride options than just buses and taxis. Chris states that there should be more "public education demonstrating how snow can disproportionately affect the most vulnerable."

Improving Victoria's snow clearing operations does appear to be on the mind of Mayor Marianne Alto. In a \*\* December 2022 Times Colonist article (<https://www.timescolonist.com/local-news/snow-removal-needs-to-be-more-routine-part-of-planning-says-victoria-mayor-6295304>)

, she states that the city does need to allocate more resources to snow removal, especially in the face of the changing climate causing temperatures to drop even lower. She says, "It's now time for us to be realistic and understand that climate adaptation means us expecting and planning for weather which used to be unusual, but now isn't." What that may mean for the persons with disabilities community is unknown at this time.

Snow, ice, and low temperatures are elements of winter that have the power to impact the vast majority of persons who identify as having a disability. Hopefully, you can take away from all this some ideas on how that impact may be lessened. Perhaps then, the long wait until spring will not seem so long. Many thanks to all the amazing people who provided their insight and ideas to the writing of this article. On behalf

of everyone at the VDRC, we hope you are able to stay warm and safe, while also being able to live your daily lives.

Of course, if all else fails, you can always do what this one anonymous source is suggesting, "Hibernate. Build a blanket nest. Never leave the blanket nest for any reason. Don't let them fool you into leaving the blanket nest."

WRITER'S NOTE: During the writing of this article, Victoria was coincidentally hit with quite a bit of snow, prompting me to finish writing it from home!

\*\* Program Spotlight - Volunteer Skills Development ()

The VDRC has been blessed over the years to have some truly wonderful volunteers who have helped with running our day-to-day operations and assisted us with offering support to the persons with disabilities community. We wanted to make sure they were equally benefitting from the work they were doing with us.

The Volunteer Skills Development Program is designed to enable all of our volunteers to get the most out of their time working with us, presenting multiple opportunities that are typically associated with office, non-profit, and customer service environments. Individuals work with the Volunteer Coordinator to choose a volunteer role that best enables them to learn the skills that they want to learn and achieve the personal development goals they have set out for themselves. In addition to receiving extensive training and orientation, volunteers are thoroughly supported by staff at all times while they are working for the VDRC. Staff are always on hand to answer questions and offer guidance and solutions to any obstacles that may come about.

"Volunteering here, I have learned from experience that I have immense value as a human being and as part of this community."

- Carolyn, Volunteer

Just a few examples of the volunteer opportunities we offer include:

\* Front Desk Volunteers answer the phones and transfer messages to the various departments within the VDRC, as well as greet service users who come into our office. Perfect opportunity for practicing communication and customer service skills, as well as becoming familiar with a typical reception desk setup.



\* Parking Placard Desk Volunteers process and distribute parking placards for people with disabilities, either in person or over the phone. They handle any incoming money and maintain thorough electronic and hard copy records of everyone who buys a placard from us. There will be plenty of opportunities to practice processing payments via cheque, as well as credit card and debit via our debit machine. Volunteers will also become familiar with how to operate our Microsoft Access database in order to keep track of a service user's placard purchase history and contact information.

\* Data Entry Volunteers work through backlogs of hardcopy parking placard applications, making sure all the correct information is properly entered into our Microsoft Access database. They would then scan and securely dispose of all paper copies. This is a very low-pressure position and perfect for anyone who may prefer working on a solo project at their own pace. The position offers plenty of opportunity for training on how to use Microsoft Access.

\* Team Lead Volunteers work on developing and practicing skills to enrich the workspace. From learning how to assess needs of associates to developing and providing adaptable methods for teaching skills to other volunteers, this is a role for trustworthy individuals who have a passion for helping others succeed.

The roles offered by the Volunteer Skills Development Program offer many promising opportunities to persons with disabilities that may not be as easily obtainable to them elsewhere. They can experience taking on leadership-type responsibilities that can greatly boost their self-esteem, address life skills training, and potentially gain the knowledge and confidence to eventually become employed, all in a safe, flexible environment that works to their abilities. Many of our volunteers have gone on to find employment in a number of different fields and even several of the VDRC's staff began their time with the organization as volunteers.

Longtime volunteer Carolyn says, "As a disabled person, the VDRC has been integral to my journey toward self-appreciation. Volunteering here, I have learned from experience that I have immense value as a human being and as part of this community. My aim in volunteering here is to help provide the same opportunities to other disabled people, as well as to help this community thrive in any way I can."

If you would like to know more about the Volunteer Skills Development Program, please feel free to reach out to our Volunteer Coordinator, Nicole Hogenson, at \*\*  
volunteer@drcvictoria.com (mailto:volunteer@drcvictoria.com)

or 250-595-0044, extension 102.

If you would like to sign up to be a volunteer, you can fill out an application form online \*\* here (<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSfIQ1TcN8WBwJpT30FEASiv-8uRAkCuhWqitvboQW9I7-R7Uw/viewform>)

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\*\* Volunteer Profile ()

\*\* ()

Kelsey Brownridge (she/her)

What area of the VDRC office do you volunteer in?

I volunteer at the front desk as reception

How long have you been volunteering with the VDRC?

I've been a volunteer since September 2022

What are some of your responsibilities in a typical volunteer shift?

As part of the front end team, I answer phones, greet service users, and check for voice and email messages

What do you enjoy most about volunteering with the VDRC?

I enjoy being part of an accepting and validating team that supports the community.

What is one thing you would want to tell anyone who is interested in volunteering with the VDRC?

There are so many things, but I think the most important is to know that you are always made to feel welcome

What do you like to do when you're not volunteering?

I always have a yarn craft on the go. Playing online or in-person co-op games.

What is your favourite food?

French fries/poutine

What is your favourite TV show, movie or book?

Anne of Green Gables

What are your favourite video games?

“Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles” for the original Nintendo, “Aladdin” and “Toejam and Earl” for the Sega Genesis, “The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time” for the Nintendo 64, “American McGee’s Alice” and “World of Warcraft” for PC

\*\* Upcoming Events ( )

A graphic of the t6talk logo.

VDRC and t6talk present “Peer Hang Out Sessions”

Date: Wednesday, January 31st, 2024 @ 12:30pm PST/3:30pm EST

Title: Peer Hang Out Sessions... An Open Forum

This week will be an Open Forum style, so we can exchange ideas and discuss issues. This approach gives us the opportunity to share what we are currently celebrating or struggling with. When you Share, it is important to let the group know if you want people to Just Listen, or if you Want Feedback. We look forward to hanging out and chatting.

Find the links to the sessions at \*\* <https://t6talk.com/events>

(<https://t6talk.com/events>)

or contact us via \*\* <https://t6talk.com/contactus> (<https://t6talk.com/contactus>)  
for more information

Note: These sessions are flexible - including the scheduled topic. As always, participation is welcomed, but not required. Join with or without your camera on.

Stay tuned to VDRC social media for more info on Peer Hangout Sessions happening in February and beyond!

Stat Holiday Closures

A graphic of a SORRY WE'RE CLOSED! sign.

The VDRC will be observing the following holidays:

- \* Family Day - Office Closed on Monday, February 19th
- \* Good Friday - Office Closed on Friday, March 29th
- \* Easter Monday - Office Closed on Monday, April 1st

\*\* VDRComics! ( )

\*\* (<https://mcusercontent.com/bd0f47ac051e04759b6449ec0/images/6fe84531-3ca5-593b-3bab-0ba2c0bb5d28.jpg>)

Written and drawn by Christopher Wooding

\*\* Donate to the VDRC ()

The Victoria Disability Resource Centre (VDRC) is a non-profit, grassroots organization that provides information, support, and skills-building programs for people with disabilities. We could not do this without your generous support!

There are multiple ways to donate:

\* Directly through CanadaHelps by clicking the following link:

+ \*\* <https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/victoria-disability-resource-centre>  
(<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/charities/victoria-disability-resource-centre>)

\* The donation form on our website \*\* here (<https://drcvictoria.com/get-involved/donate/>)

\* Over the phone via credit card at 250-595-0044

\* Through the mail via cheque to:

+ 817 A Fort Street, Victoria BC V8W 1H6

\* Via an email e-transfer to \*\* [giving@drcvictoria.com](mailto:giving@drcvictoria.com)

(<mailto:giving@drcvictoria.com>)

(if you would like a tax receipt then please add your address in the notes section of the e-transfer or email \*\* [giving@drcvictoria.com](mailto:giving@drcvictoria.com) (<mailto:giving@drcvictoria.com>)

)

Your donation will help the VDRC continue to provide services, programs and education to the local disability community, their family and friends.

The VDRC is now accepting Cryptocurrency donations!!!

\*\* Click here to donate Bitcoin (BTC) and Ether (ETH)!

(<https://www.canadahelps.org/en/cryptocurrency/72934/donate>)

Registered charity #: 89274 6165 RR0001

\*\* Supporters ()

We would like to extend our utmost gratitude to every individual, group and organization that has supported our efforts over the years!

\*\* The Province of British Columbia logo (<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/home>)

\*\* The Independent Living Canada logo (<https://www.ilc-vac.ca/>)

- \*\* The Neil Squire logo (<https://www.neilsquire.ca/>)
  
- \*\* The United Way Southern Vancouver Island logo (<https://uwsvi.ca/>)
  
- \*\* The Victoria Foundation logo (<https://victoriafoundation.bc.ca/>)
  
- \*\* The Disability Alliance BC logo (<https://disabilityalliancebc.org/>)
  
- \*\* The City of Victoria logo (<https://www.victoria.ca/#>)
  
- \*\* The Vancity logo (<https://www.vancity.com/>)
  
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- \*\* The Telus Victoria Community Board logo  
(<https://www.friendlyfuture.com/en/foundation/community-boards/vancouver-island>)
  
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(<https://www.vancitycommunityfoundation.ca/give/donor-advised-funds/greater-victoria-saving-credit-union-legacy-fund>)
  
- \*\* The Fort Properties LTD. logo (<https://www.fortproperties.ca/>)
  
- \*\* The First West Foundation Island Savings Community Endowment logo  
(<https://www.firstwestfoundation.ca/content/island-savings-community-endowment>)
  
- \*\* (<https://drcvictoria.com/about/supporters/#:~:text=Picture%20of%20Ken%20and%20Tom>)  
The Tom Dekker Fund

Questions or feedback on anything in this newsletter?

Please feel free to reach out to our Writer, Christopher Wooding, at \*\*  
[writer@drcvictoria.com](mailto:writer@drcvictoria.com) (<mailto:writer@drcvictoria.com>)  
or 250-595-0044, extension 109!

Check out our social media for more information  
on our programs and services!

\*\* Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/drcvictoriabc>)  
\*\* Twitter (<https://twitter.com/DRCVictoria>)  
\*\* Instagram (<https://www.instagram.com/drcvictoria/>)  
\*\* Website (<http://www.drcvictoria.com/>)  
\*\* YouTube (<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC1vk3DDZQDMr5nm5b5kke1A/featured>)

The VDRC logo.

817A Fort Street

Victoria, BC V8W 1H6

250-595-0044

\*\* [reception@drcvictoria.com](mailto:reception@drcvictoria.com) (<mailto:reception@drcvictoria.com>)

Open Mondays to Thursdays 9:00 am to 4:00 pm and

Fridays 9:00 am to 2:00 pm

The VDRC resides on the ancestral, unsurrendered, and unceded lands of the Songhees, Esquimalt, and W̱SÁNEĆ Nations. The VDRC recognizes the injustices upon local lands and peoples and the benefits we reap from them. We encourage our membership to give back what they can to the land and its people when possible.

If you are a settler who is interested in allyship with W̱SÁNEĆ people, please visit the Resources for Settlers page on the W̱SÁNEĆ Leadership Council Society website \*\* here (<https://wsanec.com/learn-settlers/>)

for great information.

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