

SPINAL TIMES: HOLIDAY EDITION

ISSUE 1 (DEC. 2021)

THRIVE

by Shaun Dyer, CEO



I love words. Their origin, how they fit together in a sentence, and how they combine to say mundane and magical things. One of my favourite words is *thrive*, so it shouldn't surprise you to learn that one of the things that first attracted me to SCI-AB was that *thrive* is part of the vision statement: Adapt. Adjust. *Thrive*.

Thrive comes from an old Norse word, "thrifa," which loosely translates as *grasp*. Interesting, right? To thrive is to flourish (another sweet word), to become fully alive, to *grasp* one's whole and vibrant life—whatever that means to you. Thriving's ambition is *the fullness of life*.

I have several plants at home. One of my favourites is a *Schlumbergera* or Christmas Cactus. It gets its name because of its extravagant pink and white flowers that come out in the fall between September and, well, Christmas. This year, my *Schlumbergera* bloomed like never before—more than two dozen blooms that stuck around for weeks. It was extraordinary and made me think of one of those big fireworks explosions of pink, white, yellow, green. Apparently, I've found just the right combination of light, water, temperature, and fertilizer to enable it to *thrive* because it's clearly *fully alive*.

Isn't that what we do here at SCI-AB? We help our clients find the conditions they need to grasp the fullness of their lives. We help people *thrive*. Every session in the Neuro Rehab Centre. Each peer-to-peer connection. Every time we connect someone to a community resource. Each referral from one of Alberta's rehab centres. We help people *thrive*.

The other day I asked a friend how they were doing. Their response? "I'm getting by." I get it; these are fraught times—pandemic fatigue, shrinking daylight, economic stress, etc. Some days, getting by seems like a win. But here's the thing: we are meant for more than just getting by.

We are meant to *thrive*.

As the holiday season approaches, may you connect to that which brings you life and helps you *thrive*. Happy holidays, and Merry Christmas.

DONOR SPOTLIGHT: Tara and Kimber Pipella

Interviewed by Olga Krochak Sulkin



Kimber and Tara Pipella

When I first joined Spinal Cord Injury Alberta (SCI-AB), I met with Tara and Kimber Pipella, SCI-AB's long- time generous and committed donors. I was amazed to see how involved Tara and Kimber were, and how genuinely concerned with the wellbeing of people with disabilities. Tara Pipella has been recognized in the 2022 Edition of The Best Lawyers in Canada for Personal Injury Law; and has been regularly

listed in the Canadian Legal Lexpert® Directory as a Leading Practitioner in Alberta, in the area of Personal Injury Litigation. Kimber Pipella, a former Journalist, and Television Reporter, and now a Lawyer, later joined her sister in continuing the tradition of their late father, Edward S. Pipella, Q.C., in fighting for compensation for people who have sustained serious personal injuries.

But not only that, the two sisters are very much involved with the charities they support, even if it means to “roll a day” in a wheelchair, as a part of the “Mobility Change Makers” initiative, to understand what it is like to go to work with a disability. As a Fund Development Manager, I realize that it is of utmost importance to know what motivates donors to continue and give to an organization, and so I reached out to Tara and Kimber to ask them some questions:

Q: How did the tradition of giving started?

A: Serving our community was an integral part of our family unit growing up. We would regularly partake in various charity events and raise money for the same, as our father’s clients often became part of our extended family. Coming from humble beginnings, our parents always instilled in us, the importance of “giving back.”

Q: Why do you continue to give?

A: We have always wanted to continue honouring our father’s legacy. We are passionate about various causes, and as advocates for those who have suffered catastrophic injuries, we realize how much support they need in all facets of their lives going forward. We appreciate the sponsorship opportunities, organizations like SCI-AB, have given us to get involved.

Q: Why do you think it's important to be involved with charities, and specifically with Spinal Cord Injury Alberta?

A: We have had many clients who have suffered from spinal cord injuries. SCI-AB offers its clients an opportunity for a brighter future to get back into the community and become independent again, which is so critical and challenging, when one has limited funds to make accommodations to their home, partake in recreational activities, and/or if they do not have any support from family, or loved ones.

Q: What would you say is the most important thing for you and your company, Pipella Law, while serving your clients?

A: We strive to get the best outcome for our injured clients while wading through the complex world of litigation.

Q: What would you want people after they have sustained a serious injury to know?

A: We always want clients to know the importance of having adequate insurance coverage, and advise people to ensure they have at least \$2M on their SEF 44 Protection Family Endorsement Policy. If you do not have enough insurance, or the at-fault party does not, then that will dictate the amount of compensation you receive, at the end of your lawsuit. Further, it is critical to retain competent Legal Counsel, early on, who will fight for all of your needs, so you may live more comfortably and independently after an injury.

Q: Tara – what motivated you to take over your father’s business, and continue to build and develop it?

A: I had the opportunity to work alongside my father for many years, collaborating and troubleshooting difficult cases. Since his passing in 2014, we are grateful for the many clients who appreciate our hard work and passion, to obtain a fair result.

Q: Kimber – I understand that you had a diverse career, what motivated you to re-engage with the family business?

A: It was always our father’s dream for us to work together and continue advocating for the disabled. After working as a Journalist for several years, I decided to attend law school, and had the opportunity to work with my father, upon completing my studies, which was a truly wonderful and rewarding experience. Our father always strove to make a positive difference; and we hope, as a company, we continue to do the same for our clients and their families.

In all my communications with Kimber and Tara, I have been amazed how easy going and genuine these remarkable ladies are, and I want to thank them on behalf of SCI-AB for their generous and continuous support!



From left to right: Kimber Pipella, Edward S. Pipella, Q.C., Tara Pipella

The Alberta Wheel Ladies: A Pandemic Success Story

By Brandice Lorch, RSW, C5 incomplete quadriplegic



The Covid-19 pandemic has been a socially isolating event, leaving many individuals stranded at home without contact with the outside world. However, I realize that social isolation and lack of communication with others reach far beyond the pandemic. The reality of having a neurological condition and feeling like you cannot relate to those around you exists for many individuals in our Spinal Cord Injury (SCI) community. The pandemic and the rise in using video chats to connect with others was the perfect opportunity to create a network to support others.

As a Client Service Coordinator, I have the opportunity to connect with individuals with neurological conditions when they need community support. In communicating with a few women across Alberta, who had never talked to another female in a wheelchair before, it was apparent that a change was needed. Being a female quadriplegic myself and having connections with other women across the province, I connected with Bean Gill, Founder of ReYu Rehabilitation Center and came up with a list of women to get the group started.

Over the following two months, the word spread quickly, and the group grew! Women aged 18 to 65 got together every Tuesday to chat about absolutely anything; no topic is off boundaries, and the relationships that have been formed continue to be incredibly powerful.

As the world opens after many waves of the pandemic, I see the true success of the group emerge. The conversations and friendships that have been forged encouraged group members to seek growth and opportunity. You can hear many giggles in the Alberta Wheel Ladies that room and see tearful eyes. Still, the connection through lived

experience and organic strength we provide to one another is, simply put – magical!

Through these weekly conversations, members have gained independence, started new relationships, pursued education, pursued careers, formed fitness regimens, participated in new sports, discovered mobility equipment, and many other things. Women have even travelled and moved across Alberta and BC to meet and live with other Alberta Wheel Ladies and to embark on new chapters of their lives.

During a time in the world where people have lost connection, the Alberta Wheel Ladies are rolling forward and making positive changes in the lives of others. To say I am humbled by this pandemic success is an understatement. May the strength of the Alberta Wheel Ladies continue to bring power and strength to our community, one-wheeler at a time.

To sneak a peek into the power of the Alberta Wheel Ladies chat group and its impact, check out the 30-minute AMI Documentary “**Wheel Girl Stories.**”

Your Peer Coordinators Are Still Here and Want to See You (on Zoom)!

By Terry Tenove

Hi everyone, your Calgary peer coordinator here! It has been a tough year to throw peer events, so I had to be a little inventive to keep in touch with everybody and give them a platform for addressing their issues with their peers in this incredible community. Luckily, with the technology we have now, we've been able to do regular zoom chats for people to jump on anytime they need somebody to talk to or joke around with. Recently I've also started to add some special guests from our community to share their businesses and cool services they have that would benefit everybody.

I've also been working on our YouTube Channel to add content that could help anybody that needs it. Mainly I made two playlists, one called **Youtubers in Our Community** which is full of videos I found on YouTube from different people with spinal cord injuries giving their tips and tricks and things they've learned along the way. I don't post all their videos, just a couple, but you can go to their page to check out more content. The other is a playlist with all the videos from our spinal cord injury community interactive learning series or SCILS for short.

These videos come from our monthly webinars series, in coordination with Praxis and Alberta Health Services, to create educational content with professionals and people with lived experience to help keep our community educated and get the assistance they need. These webinars are also followed up with a post-webinar chat led by me to continue

the conversation and for those who missed the webinar or had more questions they needed answered. I have added a link to both playlists here: **SCILS & Youtubers in our Community**.

The lifeblood of our peer program has always been our amazing peer mentors who take the time and energy to help those who need it along their new path. We are currently revamping and rebuilding our mentorship program and are always looking for anybody who wants to mentor someone in need. If you feel like you have the time and ability, please email me or Rob MacIsaac (Edmonton) to get more information.

Terry.tenove@sci-ab.ca
Rob.macisaac@sci-ab.ca

Hopefully, as we push through this troubling time together, we will slowly get more opportunities to reach out to you and keep you involved in our community. In the meantime, I wish you all the best from the other side of my computer screen.

Meet Sheldon!

By Rob MacIsaac, Jill Jackson and Guy Coulombe



Throughout the pandemic, Edmonton's Client Service Coordinators (CSC) have been working diligently to remain connected and provide support to clients and their families. Much of this connection has revolved, for the most part, around the use of technology, including Zoom, Skype, Facetime, and phone/email. Unfortunately, not all clients have access to technology to connect virtually. As in-person meetings have been severely limited, a key element missing from our practice was the connection within the

Glenrose Rehabilitation Hospital. Although we maintain the relationship virtually and by phone/email, it has been drastically different without physical presence due to COVID restrictions.

Before the pandemic, CSCs would receive referrals and meet with the patients and their families at the unit. Relationships were established through in-person conversations with an individual having a lived experience. These visits allowed us to have a conversation with the patients and introduce them to SCI-AB's services, such as peer support. This connection is deeply missed and of great importance. While in-person visits will always be preferred, COVID has taught us to be creative in how we stay connected, including this new and exciting pilot project... Sheldon!

Sheldon (photo above) is an exciting new pilot project that has emerged from the need to provide Edmonton CSCs means to connect with patients virtually but in real-time! With the collaboration and supports from Alberta Health Services, Glenrose Rehabilitation Research Innovation and Technology (GRRIT) and SCI-AB; unit 3B will have a virtual, interactive, and self-driving telepresence robot on-site (Double Robotics - Double 3). Currently dubbed "Sheldon," this robot will allow CSCs to have a real-time presence on-site to meet with patients and/or families, discuss services, provide information and peer support. In addition, Sheldon will remove barriers for patients that do not have access to technology, connecting them to outside supports and services such as SCI-AB.

If successful, this pilot project may open the door for expansion to other sites, and a means to have inpatients and their families connected to several community supports.

VOLUNTEERS NEEDED!

SCI-AB Edmonton is looking for strong, mobile volunteers to pick up and deliver donated medical equipment (wheelchairs, walkers, beds, porch lifts, etc.) to clients in need. Without volunteers many donated items will end up in the landfill!

If you can help, please contact:
Guy Coulombe at 587-410-2427 or
guy.coulombe@sci-ab.ca

Community Access for People in Long Term Care

By Kristie Coulombe

It has been a rollercoaster ride for the CAPCC (Community Access for People in Continuing Care) program over the last couple of years. In March 2020, everything came to a screeching halt as long-term care centres went into strict lockdowns across the province. Our CAPCC participants were not allowed to leave the facilities, and our companions were not allowed to enter overnight.

Many of our participants do not have the technology, but facilities responded quickly by connected them to Zoom. Our companions stayed in touch with their clients through this platform as participants could not leave the facility for several months. While everyone navigated the new rules and regulations, CAPCC Coordinators and companions used their creativity to bring entertainment to people inside the facilities. The things planned for residents were community gardens, virtual art classes, and outdoor concerts to keep them entertained. Some companions went out of their way to buy movie theatre popcorn so participants could enjoy popcorn and a movie safely in the comfort their rooms.

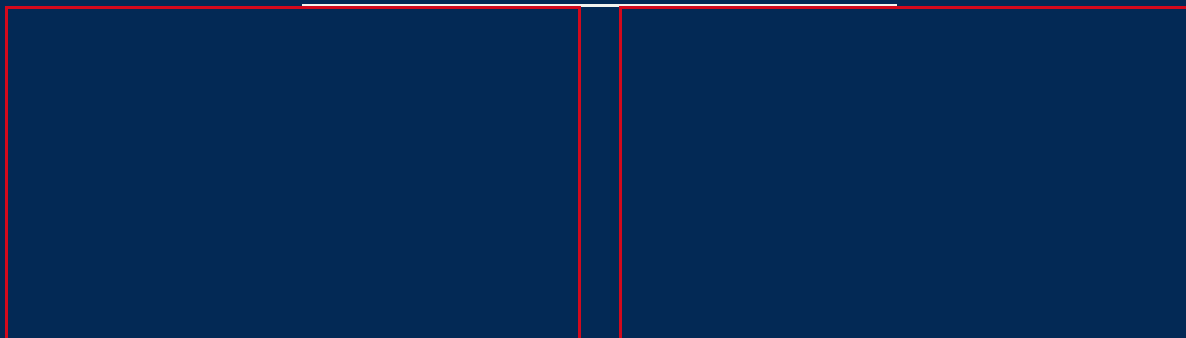
As restrictions loosened, CAPCC participants started going out again, only to shut down once more due to outbreaks and public health restrictions.

But despite all the ups and downs, CAPCC Coordinators, companions, and participants kept up positive attitudes and displayed incredible resilience. Now CAPCC participants are going out again by attending hockey games, theatre, and starting their Christmas shopping for their loved ones.

A massive shout out to everyone that worked in a long-term care facility these last 21 months. Even as the workload tripled for everyone, they made great efforts to support CAPCC outings. Also, another big shout out to all our companions who brought joy and happiness to our participants throughout the pandemic. Everyone worked together to keep the CAPCC program running and thriving!

CAPCC program: A Piece to Remember Me By

By Wanda Seifried





Elephant necklace: cremation ashes infused into jewelry. "I made a Memorial piece and not only is it beautiful, I now get to keep my son close to my heart."



Residents working on their art project with the help of CAPCC SCI-AB staff

I received several new referrals for the CAPCC young adult program during the pandemic. As I looked through the referrals, a common request kept coming up: the long-term care residents wanted art!

Not just crafts, but actual art projects. After consultation with our Crafty

Companion, Nancy, we found a solution! We decided to start "The CAPCC Art Program." This program allows our artistic clients to use high-end supplies and specialized techniques to engage in complex crafts!

What started with personalized bracelets has blossomed into metal clay memorial pieces (see image above), wood-burning projects, bath bomb-making class, clay inscribed overlay journals (image below), and the ideas keep coming to life! A unique spin to this program is the ability to instantly flip to virtual. We have been inundated with lockdowns and outbreaks throughout the pandemic that limited our young adults' opportunities for out-of-facility programs and activities. In creating this Art Program, we have been able to specifically tailor the program to do all levels of abilities and locations! Nancy, one of our companions, offers one-on-one classes with her clients and off-site group crafting! Nancy's artistic offerings and flare to create have taken the projects and the program to a whole new level!

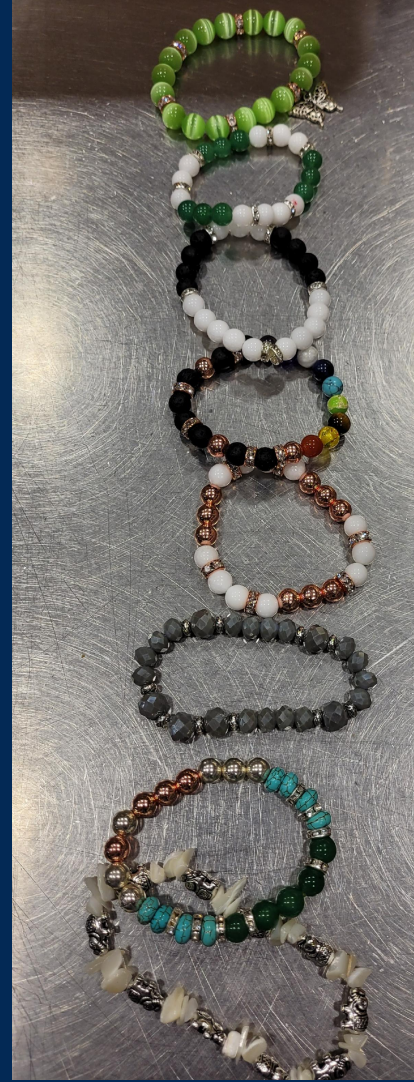
Through the art program, we have not only been able to provide activities for our young adults in long term care, but we were also able to create a sense of belonging, camaraderie and the change of scenery so needed these days.



Necklace and earrings made by young adults residents in long term care facility



Clay inscribed overlay journal



"I made bracelets for my family, I can't remember the last time I was this excited to hand out gifts, they aren't going to believe it," says one resident



Gloria showcasing her work

CAPCC program: A Simple Thank You!

Provided by Roswitha Dziwenko

"I wanted to share with you some simply amazing experiences brought on by the support of CAPCC. Your contributions have influenced the lives of our residents in positive and rewarding ways. This would absolutely NOT be possible without you! I wonder if you even know how wonderful it is to be thought of and included in generous gifts of love?

Well, that is how you make us all feel with the generous support of CAPCC funding for our facility to purchase an indoor curling set. None of our residents can go out into the community to curl due to their complex needs. Through the CAPCC funding of an indoor curling set, we could bring the curling community to them! The first time we set up

the curling set, a woman who does not engage in any active/organized recreation watched from a distance as we orientated everyone on how to play. Then, something stunning happened. She asked if she could have a turn! She rarely speaks! She had a wonderful time having several turns, and she was good at it for a beginner. She accepted our cheers, support and looks forward to playing again.

CAPCC provided funds so our facility could have an entertainer come and entertain us. Unfortunately, none of our residents can access the community to participate in this type of event due to their complex needs and Covid. The entertainer that we chose was wonderful. He engaged the crowd. Residents who do not regularly speak or cannot frame small sentences were singing along to the lyrics of the familiar songs. Residents with complex physical needs could dance (and wanted to dance!-modified), and everyone experienced great joy from being in such a happy atmosphere. Especially during these times, the need for social support and sensory stimulation is critical to the wellbeing of our residents. Every resident who participates in this program enjoyed themselves, many reporting that it was the best day.

These times have been particularly hard. Please accept this note of great thanks for bringing the community to us-it is vital for the health and wellbeing of all, to know that there is a community out there reaching out to them, and that they can exist in it despite their complex needs, and that they are valuable members of community.

Holiday News from Grande Prairie

By Mieke de Groot



The year-round mission of SCI-AB is *To empower persons with spinal cord injuries and other physical disabilities to achieve independence and full community participation*, and at this time of year, we turn to Santa to help carry the successes we celebrate. Spinal Cord Injury Staff in the Grande Prairie Region is a Regional Program Coordinator. Someone refers to this position as a “one person show,” but nothing gets done without the support of Santa’s Elves, our community partners and volunteers.

What do the Grande Prairie Region elves pack in Santa’s bag? Client Support Services Coordination, The Peer Program, Community Development and Systemic Change, and Information Services.

What are the treats that Santa is placing in our socks? Stories of success!

This year our community partners and volunteers made some significant changes in the community.

One of these highlights was during the International Day of Persons with Disabilities virtual event. The event in the Peace Region was celebrated on December 10th, 2021 and acknowledged both the United Nation theme of leadership by persons with disabilities and the local theme of *Notice us the Future is Accessible: Not all disabilities are Visible*.

The Alberta Premier’s Council of Persons with Disabilities awarded two people nominated by SCI-AB for their contributions in *Public Awareness*: Michelle Sutley/SCI-AB Volunteer and Tyler Horrocks/Wolverines Wheelchair Sports Association Volunteer. The Accessibility Advisory Committee of Grande Prairie awarded Corrie Funk the *Inclusive Community Award*. Corrie has historically devoted many hours as a volunteer on behalf of the SCI-AB public awareness campaign, *Chair-Leaders Enabling Access Event*.



Corrie and Michelle receiving awards

Another volunteer led initiative was initiated and led by Cecil Pizzey, SCI-AB board member, who has put the only accessible taxi on the road in Grande Prairie.

SCI-AB also supported the development of a group of self advocates. With support by SCI-AB staff, the leader of the *Northwest Alberta Self-Advocates*, Paulette McGinnis, has created a presentation to promote self-advocacy. She was matched with a student volunteer from the Physical Education and Kinesiology Department of the Grande Prairie Regional College (GPRC) who helped her become more proficient with Google tools and the virtual meeting platforms.

To each of our readers, and to the elves in your lives, the Grande Prairie Region of Spinal Cord Injury Alberta wishes to wrap your winter

Thoughts of Gratitude

By Olga Krochak Sulkin

A year ago, at Christmas time, I remember thinking, "we just need to hold on there for a little more, and this whole Covid thing will end soon," but it did not end. Who could have imagined that a year later, we are still in a pandemic mode? Yet despite that, there was never a time when I saw so much good around me. I have seen my neighbourhood mobilize to raise funds for families who could not afford to buy their kids gifts for Christmas, I have seen people paying for others in grocery stores and drive thrus, and I have been inspired to give more than I had ever given before, even though that I was not working, and the financial situation was not easy. I learned that there is always hope even during the most challenging times, and if you can give even a sliver of hope to someone else, you might have just changed their lives forever.

So, it was not surprising to me that when I came to work with SCI-AB, I met with some of the most positive and motivated people in my life, despite dealing with physical disabilities day after day.

I met a client whose positive outlook pushed them to exercise multiple times a week and make huge progress in their recovery after an accident that left them paralyzed.

I met with a volunteer who said that their injury made them look at life from a completely different perspective and appreciate it more.

I have the honour of working with dedicated staff that come up with innovative ways to serve clients where visitors are not allowed and still help with whatever they can and in remarkable ways.

It is incredible to see how such a small organization serves the entire province and does that with limited budget and resources but with a lot of creativity and enthusiasm. Some might call it "thrifty," but I call it *extraordinary*.

So while we are still in a pandemic mode, and some of us are more isolated than others, I believe that there is more good than bad. I believe that each of us has the capacity to give, whether by monetary means, donating time and expertise, or by being there, just listening to someone in need. We have so much potential for good; we just need to have hope and believe in each other and ourselves.

Merry Christmas and Season's Greetings! May the light in your heart shine upon you and your loved ones!



Happy Holidays from SCI-AB!

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