



## VISION

Working together to build inclusive communities for people of all abilities.

## MISSION

SaskAbilities supports people experiencing disability with programs and services to enhance their lives.

## VALUES

We treat people with respect, honesty and compassion.

Our programs and services are client-centred, goal-oriented and accountable.

We value teamwork, excellence and innovation.

Working together to build inclusive communities for people of all abilities.



SaskAbilities

VOL 52 NO.2  
AUGUST 2020

# ConnectAbilities

## Different methods, same heartfelt support

When the COVID-19 pandemic was declared in mid-March, it meant the Swift Current branch program team had to get creative to reach out to clients who were facing a new reality of having to stay in their homes for an undetermined amount of time.

"It was daunting at first," said Program Senior Supervisor Kim Furey. Kim leads a team of six full-time support staff in Swift Current, who typically work with more than 55 Quality of Life clients each day at the branch. Support staff have been in regular contact with all clients by telephone, video conferencing, and socially-distanced drop-offs at clients' doors.

"It definitely threw us for a loop because we went from working with our clients and seeing them every day, and then having to wrack our brains to come up with creative solutions so that we could still connect. It was hard at first, especially because I think it's safe to say that we were all missing that 'human connection' and feeling isolated."

In mid-April, Kim and the support team introduced virtual programming. "We are so grateful to care

providers like Southwest Homes and The Meadows Long-Term Care Facility, and all the family members, who have worked hard to make sure that our clients could connect. It's a two-way street... not only have we seen how it positively impacts clients, I personally feel uplifted every time we reach people while we're socially distancing," Kim noted.

Families of local clients say they're grateful for the virtual support their loved ones are being provided by the support team, too.

Erin Fenwick says her 20-year-old son, Chance, found the lack of routine and lack of socialization was his biggest barrier. "I think when we first found out that we couldn't do our normal routines, it makes people anxious. He [Chance] was anxious. Nobody knew what was coming next, I guess. Not having routine, everybody kind of just panics. And it's nice to get up in the morning have a purpose and know what's happening, and the Quality of Life program has given him that. He really missed his friends. He really missed everybody just being together and I

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## A Word from our Executive Director

Everyone feels the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

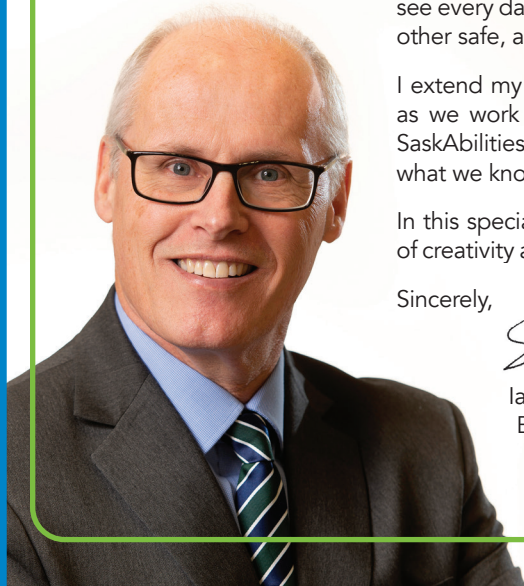
As we continue to actively monitor and respond to the Public Health Agency of Canada's and Saskatchewan's Chief Medical Health Officer's orders and recommendations, we also work to keep SaskAbilities' programs and services open to individuals experiencing disability in a safe manner. We have made modifications so that programs and services may continue to be offered in different ways while keeping the safety of clients and staff members at the forefront. I am so grateful for the compassion and resiliency that we see every day from staff members as they support clients, keep each other safe, and meet our community responsibilities.

I extend my gratitude to the Board of Directors for their guidance as we work through these difficult and changing times. And to SaskAbilities' donors, thank you for continuing to support us through what we know is a difficult time for all.

In this special edition of our Spring Bulletin, we are sharing stories of creativity and innovation that are keeping our connections strong.

Sincerely,

Ian Wilkinson  
Executive Director, SaskAbilities



## DIFFERENT METHODS CONTINUED

think that's the thing – he enjoys people – just talking and being a part of things. Knowing that he still has that support and we are not alone in all of this has been really nice.”

Virtual programming has taken on many forms, all of which are led by different support team members at different times. Clients can log in and join whichever sessions pique their particular interests.

There have been coffee chats, virtual game playing, a “lunch bunch”, Zumba, all-request music hours, virtual walks around the neighbourhood,



show and tell, outdoor fitness classes & stretching, and “Armchair Adventures”, featuring virtual tours of the world. So far, according to the team, the most popular virtual tour has been an underwater exploration of the Titanic.


“I’ve been really impressed with the variety of stuff that the staff have come up with,” noted Erin. “The enthusiasm, too. It means a lot to Chance, and to all of us.”

The positive ripple effect extends to all involved with this dynamic change of service delivery in Swift Current.

“Being able to interact with the clients again brought me so much joy!” exclaimed Support Worker, Ashley Denis. “I was definitely missing being able to interact and do programs with them. I love being able to see clients through video calls. This has given me another boost of energy and gives me the ability to be social without putting myself or anyone else at risk. I look forward to going to work. When I join a group, I feel excited to be able to hear stories and be a part of their lives. The pandemic has changed my normal schedule and took a huge chunk out of my normal life. I feel like my routine is returning; it may look a lot different but I am so happy that we are doing all we can to return normality.”

Swift Current branch typically has a monthly birthday party but the temporary closure of public access to the branch forced the postponement of March’s birthday celebration. With 45 birthdays between March and April, Kimthought a virtual birthday celebration may be the way to go.

“We had support staff create small gift bags, including a cupcake, for each person celebrating in March or April and two support staff attended various residences and safely delivered the gifts to each and every person who could be reached.”

Dayna Campbell, Support Worker, was one of the team members designated to deliver gifts. “The joy that was found in this experience was awesome – getting to reconnect with everybody around SaskAbilities was truly amazing.” 

## Delivering Employment Supports in a New Way

Like their counterparts across the province, Regina and Moose Jaw Partners in Employment staff began working from home in March. For many, working at a distance and using an array of technology or social media was not second nature, but staff members were up to the challenge and quickly transitioned from technological dabbling to mastery!


A small group of staff members worked together to develop the tools needed to shift to virtual programming, including a specific Facebook page that provides a checkpoint for participants to access the group and content that was customized to be more distance friendly.

Jolie Anderson, Career Planner and Work Readiness Coordinator, is pleased with how quickly staff members and clients adapted to the recent changes to programming, “Clients have really stepped up and are open and wanting to access these workshops and feel comfortable doing so. Clients learned, step-by-step how to participate in online workshops and are now gaining and improving their computer skills. I find it has been all around beneficial to the participants. The work and presentations that staff are providing are helping the clients move toward being job ready and getting them to the next stage of job search.”

On March 30th, Work Readiness Coordinators, Lori Lynn Rust and Steve Zary, delivered the first work readiness workshop to participants via Facebook Live. In two weeks, the page became a lively offering of livestream workshops, focused information, and a bit of fun with an opportunity to win small gifts. One of our participants said, “It’s very helpful information to learn and get more positive thinking, good tips to learn for work, and everyday interactions with family members or friends.”

Clients have been finding it easy to access and participate in online programming and are getting great information, tips, and skills from these workshops. Partners in Employment has also maintained direct contact with clients. Jolie said, “The mock interviews held over the phone felt real for participants who had to work through nerves that come along with real interviews. It’s great that services can carry on and our clients can still benefit.”

By offering information and skill building sessions, Partners in Employment continues to support the needs of clients. Trevor Folgering, Partners in Employment Job Developer, is one of the online job training presenters. He said, “Offering instructional videos not only provides information to our current clients, but it also builds an information library that we can continue to use in the future. Many of the online tools we have access to blend perfectly with the messaging we want to share.”

Interest in workshops continues to increase with participants asking what other workshops are available. Great work, Regina team! 



# Saskatoon Day Program Adapting and Growing

The Saskatoon Quality of Life Centres provide adults experiencing disability opportunities to learn about themselves, participate in the community through activities and volunteerism, and gain positive experiences. Knowing how important this program is, staff members and participants alike were quick to act when changes were needed due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The day program shifted to online programming offering clients three options: to participate in online group activities, receive individual calls from staff, or a combination of the options.

The program also offers five timeslots each day with at least two activities to choose from in each timeslot. Activities are wide ranging and include fitness classes, live music from staff members, games, language lessons, and book club. Customized schedules are sent to caregivers each day with links to join programs. Clients can choose as many or as few activities as they would like. Miranda said, "In our first week we offered 53 activities, had 190 attendees, and called clients 64 times. We are so pleased to continue to keep connections to our clients during such challenging times."

Alia has been transitioning from high school to SaskAbilities Quality of Life program over the past few months and is one of many clients taking advantage of online group activities. Her mom, Rochelle, said, "I am so impressed with how the activities are working out! Alia has been joining 2-3 times per day and really enjoying them. It is certainly helping to fill that void in her day to connect with others, aside from her family at home. Well done!"



John, who regularly attends the Saskatoon Quality of Life Program, has participated in almost every online group activity. His mom, Helen, said, "The online programming has made a huge difference in his life. He was becoming very anxious & depressed at home since not attending the day program. The activities have made all the difference for him and for me as I am not as concerned about his mental health." 🧑🏻‍🦧

## Yorkton Goes Virtual

The Yorkton Branch has really shown their sense of community where staff members, participants, and caregivers are working together to stay connected

Virtual programming at Yorkton Branch's Day Program offers opportunities for participants to tune into activities lead by their Support Workers. Through Facebook live, staff members have found creative ways to stay connected. Staff and participants have come together to enjoy a variety of programs. Jackie Washenfelder, Quality of Life Senior Supervisor, has been broadcasting Facebook

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**TOP LEFT TO RIGHT:** Subramani Arumugam, Cheryl Greba, Leesa Gross **SECOND ROW L to R:** Chris Smith, Jackie Washenfelder, Darcy Beck **THIRD ROW L to R:** Parminder Kaur, Wendy Haberman, Tara Schuster **BOTTOM L to R:** Jericho Howard, Sheila Reynolds



## GENERAL INFORMATION

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## YORKTON CONTINUED

Live music sessions for individuals and caregivers by leading sing-a-longs while interacting with participants and taking requests. She said, "Singing is something we have always enjoyed as a group. I genuinely believe it brings people together. Many of our day program participants have participated through Facebook Live and the feedback has been great!" She went on to say, "Being able to see each others online and provide visuals for our activities has really kept our connections strong. I particularly love when caregivers post pictures of individuals participating along from home!"

Subramani Arumugam, Sensory Gym Facilitator, offers weekly fitness classes where individuals can tune in to exercise and stretch along. As you can see, you don't need fancy equipment to participate!

The online activities don't stop there. The program also offers other activities including meditation, dancing, baking classes, science experiments and crafts.

Jackie said, "One of the best outcomes from the alternative programming is seeing first-hand how connected we can still be. During the pandemic, we have celebrated birthdays by meeting at participants' homes to sing happy birthday from their sidewalks, we have dropped off food baskets and activity bags using social distancing, and have opened our homes to our participants by providing Facebook lives from our kitchen tables! It's such a great feeling to know that we can be there for each other in challenging times." The Day Program staff members, led by Sheila Reynolds, Program Coordinator, have been amazing and have risen up to every new challenge that we have suggested." 

## JOIN SASKABILITIES TODAY!

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