

The Link

CONNECTRA
CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Spring 2010

Expo celebrates the art of the possible

ConnecTra's multi-agency resource fair connected hundreds of individuals with disabilities and Metro Vancouver's most useful service providers.

The Abilities Expo brought people together at Roundhouse Community Centre for an afternoon of presentations and networking, April 21. Overall, the event focused on people with disabilities that were leading successful, fulfilling lives, said organizer Steve Street.

"We had more than 110 persons with disabilities attending – we stopped counting at 113," he said. "On top of that, there were 27 service providers, all with display tables specifically for persons with disabilities, and various presenters.

"The feedback I'm getting from the organizations that attended is that they found it very useful to find new members and network with each other.

"It was ConnecTra's third and biggest expo, and we hope to continue these."

Presentations and demonstrations focused on practical solutions to everyday access needs, promoting assistive devices, grants and employment opportunities.

Experts were on hand to talk about accessories, advocacy, assistive devices, children's needs, clothing, equipment, employment, housing, leisure, recreation, rehab services, sport, technology, training, transit, theatre . . . and more.

In addition there were movies, live music, a display by wheelchair dancers and the work of artists with disabilities.



Canadian Wheelchair Dance Academy

Paul Gauthier, Network Coordinator for the BC Personal Supports Network, spoke of the new Equipment and Assistive Technology Initiative, which aims to



Participation: Paul Gauthier onstage (and inset) talking about funding opportunities to enable work and volunteer opportunities.

fund the employment and volunteer goals of people with disabilities. He said he reached a new audience and made some useful contacts of his own.

"I had a lot of people come to me for more information after my presentation," he said. "There was a lot of interest in our program.

"I really liked the focus on abilities at the Expo. There were people from all over who were working, and involved in the arts, and really participating and doing amazing things in the community.

"It was all about abilities and full participation. Our program focuses on people's goals around employment and volunteering. With assistive devices we can achieve that."

The event was also noteworthy for being the launch of musician syvli macCormac's ambitious multimedia project, *Th Rose and Th Railway*. This combines the written word with music and environmental recordings to delve back into the life and times of Irish poet WB Yeats.

- ConnecTra's next meeting is 1:30-3:30pm on **Tuesday, June 22**, at the Roundhouse. See the website for more information – www.connectra.org.

ConnecTra info: 604-688-6464 ext. 115

sstreet@disabilityfoundation.org



Monica Gartner.



Lawrence Shapiro.



Alexis Chicoine.

Lending a helping hand at Vancouver Olympics

A group of dedicated ConnecTra members volunteered at the Vancouver 2010 Winter Olympics.

Linda McGowan, Alexis Chicoine, Monica Gartner, Lawrence Shapiro and Terry Leblanc all gave their time and expertise to help out at the international event.

“It was wonderful – a truly amazing atmosphere,” said McGowan, who both volunteered for the International Olympic Committee and represented HandiDART, for who she works as consumer advocacy manager.

“I went round all the venues ahead of the event to check out how people with disabilities would access venues. I also checked the venues, for things like food service – did they have a lower counter for people in wheelchairs?”

Meanwhile, Chicoine was on stage during the Paralympic opening ceremonies, and Gartner and Shapiro both performed with the Canadian Wheelchair Dance Academy on various occasions.

Gartner explained that she performed six times with the wheelchair dance group, including the Paralympic torch ceremonies.

“Coke hired us for the torch ceremonies followed by two volunteer dances for Vanoc. As for the number

of hours, I've lost track. We started rehearsing once a week in late January, then twice a week in February and finally a week before the performances it was every night.

“Rehearsals were anywhere from two hours to four hours. Three of the dances also worked full-time during the day.”

Leblanc was involved with filming for the BC Society for Disability and Media, using a prototype camera wheelchair, the CanAssist PoleCam. CanAssist is a University of Victoria-based program that helps people with disabilities access specialized equipment.

“The Powerchair uses a state-of-the-art video set up consisting of a carbon fiber pole with high-definition camera at the end,” he explained. “The Pole is raised and lowered via a sip and puff interface and the camera is controlled by a joystick. A high-resolution video monitor on the chair shows what the camera is shooting.

“The debut of the chair was during Sam Sullivan's Olympic torch run. Talk about baptism by fire; I was dealing with VPD motorcycle policeman and Olympic torch security as I jostled for the perfect shot. After that it was used to film some other Olympic festivities such as the performances of the Canadian

Wheelchair Dance Academy flash mob. The last event filmed was the parade of athletes in Whistler Village as they entered the Paralympic closing ceremonies.”

Leblanc used another camera mount, this one designed by the Tetra Society, to film some of the Paralympic and Olympic festivities. He had “an able teacher” in the form of National Film Board director and filmmaker Joe Moulins. Joe is one of the original founders of The BC Society for Disability and Media.



Boom economy: Terry Leblanc filming Sam Sullivan's Olympic torch run with a sip n' puff camera boom.