

AT Banter Podcast Episode 232 - Alanna Hendren

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SPEAKERS

Rob Mineault, Steve Barclay, Karen Mckay, Ryan Fleury, Alanna Hendren

-  **R** Rob Mineault 00:44
Hey, and welcome to another episode of AT Banter.
-  **S** Steve Barclay 00:49
banter banter
-  **R** Ryan Fleury 00:54
Mine was better than the first take.
-  **S** Steve Barclay 00:57
He can splice it.
-  **R** Rob Mineault 01:01
Hey, my name is Rob Mineault. Oh, and joining me today. Look who it is. It's Mr. Ryan Fleury.



Ryan Fleury 01:06

Hello again.



Rob Mineault 01:08

And Mr. Steve Barclay.



Steve Barclay 01:12

Just call me scut worker.



Rob Mineault 01:15

What?



Ryan Fleury 01:17

Scut worker?



Steve Barclay 01:19

I'm doing a physical inventory count today.



Rob Mineault 01:22

What is a scut worker?



Ryan Fleury 01:24

I've never know somebody does scut work?



Rob Mineault 01:26

I've never heard the word. The term "scut" worked before. No, wait, wait, I've never heard that term before. Am I just out of it now?



Steve Barclay 01:44

I gotta look it up.

- R** Ryan Fleury 01:46
Today's episode brought to you buy the word scut.
- S** Steve Barclay 01:55
Scut work actually has a Merriam Webster's dictionary definition.
- R** Rob Mineault 01:58
Is it really? Wow,
- K** Karen Mckay 02:01
it does. Yeah. Yeah, it means "routine, routine, and often menial labor".
- R** Rob Mineault 02:10
Really? See, I hate it when this happens. When I find out that I've lived my entire life not knowing about something like this is completely new to me.
- R** Ryan Fleury 02:20
I don't think your life is any more complete, now that you know about the word scut.
- R** Rob Mineault 02:25
Well, you know,
- S** Steve Barclay 02:27
I tend to disagree. it feels a lot like you can die in peace now.
- R** Rob Mineault 02:42
Hey, Ryan.
- R** Ryan Fleury 02:44
Yes, Rob?

R Rob Mineault 02:45
What are we doing today?

R Ryan Fleury 02:49
Today we are speaking with the executive director from the developmental disabilities association of Vancouver, Richmond, Alanna Hendren, all about what they do over there.

R Rob Mineault 03:00
It's a pretty big nonprofit.

R Ryan Fleury 03:02
Well, this, you know, it's a topic we haven't really touched on in our whole time doing this podcast. And so it was time to reach out to somebody and just get more information. So a lot of things, you know, even though we've been in the disability field for, you know, 20/30 years, there's just a lot of things we don't know. Yeah. And so it's educational for me as well, when we get guests on here that I know nothing about.

R Rob Mineault 03:27
Look at this. We're learning, we're counting. It's like a episode of Sesame Street.

S Steve Barclay 03:35
Cookie.

R Rob Mineault 03:38
So you know, hey, before we get too far down that rabbit hole and start the show, we do have a bit a little bit of an update from last week's show. And we're actually going to bring on Karen McKay, who joined us last week, From CELA, because we have a little bit of an update.

R Ryan Fleury 03:56
Hello. Good afternoon. How are you?

K Karen Mckay 04:00
I'm good. Thanks. Happy St. Patrick's Day to all of you.

R Ryan Fleury 04:03
I guess it is.

R Rob Mineault 04:04
Well listen. Yeah. Thanks for thanks for stopping by and giving us a little bit of an update. You know, we saw the news yesterday. And so we wanted to sort of get get a little bit of your reaction to it. Because, you know, as with a lot of these things, a lot of the releases are phrased in a way where it's just like, this is good news??

R Ryan Fleury 04:29
Yeah.

R Rob Mineault 04:30
So we wanted to sort of get your reaction before we just sort of went off on our own interpretation. So maybe if you could just sort of encapsulate what the what the news is at first, and then we'll go from there.

K Karen Mckay 04:46
So on .. well, just get my day straight ... on Tuesday, Laurie Davidson, who's our executive director and Kevin Millsaps, who is the executive director of BC co ops which oversees NNELS, met with Minister. Qualtrough and some of her staff for about a half an hour meeting, and in that meeting, they had a really fruitful discussion. Minister Qualtrough was wanting to make sure that, that we understood that she's committed to ensuring equitable access for reading materials. And from that meeting came the announcement, which was sent out shortly after. And it basically outlines that for the coming budget year, so that would be 2021 2022, which begins April 1, there would be no cuts to funding for CELA or NNELS. So that \$1 million cut that we were anticipating has been we've we have a reprieve it's been perhaps pushed off. We don't know the answer to that question yet. So for this year, we're not anticipating any changes to our services. But as part of our conversation with Minister Qualtrough, we also talked about the need for a long term strategy for funding and also for ensuring that the publishing industry and other

stakeholders have a place at the table, we need to ensure that they can, they can be heard. So we have heard from a number of the publishing groups over the last week or so as we've been doing this work, and they and we really support the idea of worn accessible books. So that's more books being made accessible at the source so that publishers are aware that they need to be thinking about accessibility and doing their best to support accessible materials right from the get go. But we also heard from them that, that the industry is not in a place to take on sole responsibility for producing all of the accessible formats that that really need to be produced in order to have an equitable reading landscape. And so we had a conversation with Minister Qualtrough with with regards to that. And we're hoping that going forward in the, in the short term, all of the folks that are invested in this issue will be able to come to the table and have some conversations, acknowledge the realities of you know, COVID, and potentially post COVID knock on wood. But also just the idea that the, you know, that we need to work together. And that there's a place for organizations like CELA and NNELS in this work on an ongoing basis, there's definitely need for the federal government to be at the table so that we ensure equitable standards across the country, and that the publishers have a role to play to but you know, it's it's, it's perhaps not realistic to expect them to pick up the entire ball and carry it all the way down the field to use a sports metaphor that I'm not, I don't play football, so I don't know much.

R Ryan Fleury 07:37
Perfect.

K Karen Mckay 07:39
Yeah, so um, so I don't know that I have a whole lot more to share on that. Minister Qualtrough release was, um, it definitely had some spin to it. So she announced a million dollars in new funding. And we've had some calls and some, some feedback from some of our partners in the advocacy and some of our users who have wondered if we actually got a raise. And unfortunately, that's not true. We just, they've just pushed the the funding cuts off for a year, we don't have assurances from the federal government that we won't be looking at, at the same funding cuts a year from now. So what we don't want to do is have to go through this process again, and light everybody's hair on fire. I don't think that I don't think that that was the intention of the government. And, you know, we certainly are grateful for the reprieve and been grateful for the conversation that we had with Minister Qualtrough. But we also recognize us to she, that there needs to be a longer term strategy available. And as I said before, it needs to include all of the stakeholders. So that's what we're hoping for. Her release did not include that, but we did get her assurances in our meeting, that that would be something that we would be would be able to look forward

to. And so we're hoping to, to see that movement sooner rather than later.

R

Rob Mineault 09:05

Now, the release also mentioned \$10 million towards I guess, and I'm a little fuzzy on exactly what the what the the \$10 million is for but it mentioned \$10 million going towards trying to develop a long term strategy, is that correct?

K

Karen Mckay 09:25

So this is where it gets a little convoluted. So the \$10 million is actually the money that they had had announced in the fall economic statement as our budget cuts. So initially this year we were to have had like last year had \$4 million split between sealant and nails. And then this coming budget year, we will have 3 million and then 2 million and then 1 million so that represents the \$10 million pot that they're talking about. So even though they're say they're investing this \$10 million, it's not new money, and it's not and it doesn't address the cuts that actually it actually includes the cuts in that figure. So, so that's why we want to make sure that we're having this conversation about long term sustainable funding, because the the suggestion, or the concern is that we could be back here in a year having to have these conversations. The really great news is that this advocacy campaign, thanks to guys like you, thanks to our partners, thanks to our users, it really raised the level of conversation around accessible materials production, we, you know, there were mentioned in the senate yesterday, there's been mentioned on the floor and House of Commons. We've had lots of media picking up the story, who, you know, mainstream media who are not always aware of these issues. So I've been having lots of great conversations with reporters about what accessible publishing actually means and who it serves. And so there's a there's a level of awareness there that I think will help us going forward in terms of creating the conversations that we need to create about really making sure that we have a fully inclusive and fully equitable reading landscape in the future. And, you know, the government is aware of all of the advocacy that's been done. We really think it's through the work of, of folks like you and our users that pushed quite hard with their local MPs, and with minister quatros, to make sure that, that she understood and that the government understood the value of these services and the importance of these services for all Canadians and all folks with print disabilities, like we know, that's one in 10 people. And so, you know, that's a significant constituency, for for MPs, they need to be paying attention to this issue. And they are now so we're quite grateful for that as well.

R

Rob Mineault 11:44

So in terms of a strategy now, now that the talks are open, you know, what can people best do? Like is are you just sort of telling people just to keep an eye on things and get ready to push again? Or what should people be doing?

K

Karen Mckay 11:59

Well, I'm actually heading into a strategy meeting in about 20 minutes to just discuss exactly that. So there are some some things being organized. We know that Braille Literacy Canada's holding an event tomorrow night, Thursday night, to to give people a place to sort of voice their concerns, get their questions answered, and CELA and NNELS will both be there, we are looking at holding some similar kinds of conversations with our constituents, with our libraries with our users going forward. And that will be something that we talking about, as well. We, you know, we did have a conversation about do we lay down arms? Or do we sort of continue with the the considerate and thoughtful conversations that we need to be having with the government. So we don't want this to be antagonistic by any means, because we, you know, we did accomplish our primary goal, which was to reserve the funding, preserve the funding for this year. But, but I do think it's important to stay on the radar, especially as we are striving to get everybody to the table to have these conversations. And, you know, it's challenging for the government as well, because because there's not a really a good place for CELA to land in terms of funding model, we're kind of a unique organization as NNELS. And and so those conversations need to be had as well, where's the best place to ensure that the needs of users with print disabilities get the attention and the services that they need through the government and through CELA, NNELS. And so that will be part of the conversation as well. So from the CELA perspective, our commitments to keep people up to date, as we have these conversations, so we're gonna leave our advocacy page up, we'll be as there's things to announce or update folks on what we putting that information out on the blog, we might reach out to media partners like you just to say, hey, we've got a bit of an update, we can let you know what's happening. Because what we don't want is for Accessible Publishing and the need for those books to recede. To the point that, you know, we're not making progress, or that, that that folks who make these decisions aren't aware of the importance of them and don't recognize the importance of them. And I'm not by any means suggesting that Minister Qualtrough doesn't understand that clearly, she does. And she's been an advocate for folks with disabilities for a long time. But, you know, it would be a disservice for I think, for CELA and NNELS and our our partners in the publishing industry to miss this opportunity to really make some headway for longer term strategies.

R

Rob Mineault 14:36

Right. Well listen, anytime you want to come on, if you have any updates, we're more than happy to have you I have many more questions, but I know they have to run and we don't want to keep you but we really appreciate you coming on and giving us a little bit of an update. And yeah, if if we need to start pushing again. We're certainly happy to help with that.

K

Karen Mckay 15:00

Well, thank you very much. We really appreciate the opportunity to speak with you and for you your work and reaching out to your listeners. And do stay tuned on our blog and our social media. And I will be in touch with you guys if we if and when we have some more good needs to announce.

R

Rob Mineault 15:14

Wonderful. That's great. Okay, Karen. Well, thanks, guys. Good luck with the meeting. And we will talk to you again soon.

K

Karen Mckay 15:21

Thanks so much. I really appreciate your interest in the story.

R

Rob Mineault 15:23

Awesome.

R

Ryan Fleury 15:24

Great. Thanks for your time. Take care.

K

Karen Mckay 15:25

Bye Bye.

R

Ryan Fleury 16:08

Joining us now is Alanna Hendren. So, Alana, thank you so much for joining us today. I am Ryan Fleury. And joining us in the room is Steve Barclay.

 Steve Barclay 16:17
Hello,

 Ryan Fleury 16:19
and Rob Mineault.

 Rob Mineault 16:20
hello there.

 Alanna Hendren 16:22
Gentlemen, thank you for inviting me.

 Ryan Fleury 16:23
Well, we're glad to have you you know, every once in a while, we'd like to try to bring awareness to a local disability organization who's doing really good work. And so, you know, I think I had my lines a little bit confused, because I thought you were a Developmental Disabilities BC, but that doesn't matter. Because you're still developmental disabilities IN BC.

 Steve Barclay 16:43
You're just local.

 Alanna Hendren 16:45
That's right.

 Ryan Fleury 16:46
That's even better.

 Alanna Hendren 16:47
We're services.

R Ryan Fleury 16:48
Exactly.

S Steve Barclay 16:49
You're where the rubber meets the road.

A Alanna Hendren 16:51
Exactly.

R Ryan Fleury 16:53
Excellent. So yes, thank you so much for taking some time to join us.

A Alanna Hendren 16:57
No problem. Like I say, it's my pleasure to be here and meet you guys.

R Rob Mineault 17:01
Well, hey, you know, that's a good segueway into just maybe giving us a little bit of an overview of what the organization does do.

A Alanna Hendren 17:09
Okay, um, the developmental disabilities association was actually created in 1952. It was created by a small group of families who didn't want to put their adult or their children into institutions. So that was the only place that kids could be educated in those days. So what they did is they rented church basements, literally. And the parents took turns teaching the kids, one of the parents had a big station wagon. And so she'd pick all these little kids up in the morning and the station wagon, they'd go to school, one of the families, mostly moms would teach a course. And then they'd all go back home. A number of years after doing that they managed to secure some funding to get a teacher. Then they secured more funding, mostly through fundraising and from government grants to build the Oak Ridge School, which in Vancouver was the special needs school, from literally primary all the way to high school grades. And those were the first group of people who actually got educated in the community instead of in the institution. Then over time, schools began accepting kids with developmental and other disabilities, and

their neighborhood schools. And so the association donated the Oak Ridge school to the Vancouver city school board. And then the parents who were involved, of course, wanted more adult programming. So they started sheltered workshops, and they started residential group homes, which were quite big at the beginning. And over time, we've evolved so that now we run infant development programs so that if somebody is in the hospital, let's say a couple, it's just had their first baby and the baby has a developmental or other disability, then our workers are there to assist them and also to help them at home. Then we have inclusive preschool and childcare services. And we have adult services like our drop in we've got Star Wars which was a social enterprise that we operate. We have all sorts of day programs for every level of intellectual capacity. And we have independent living homeshare semi Independent Living group homes. So the full range of services for people with developmental disabilities from birth to palliative care when people get elderly and ill, our staff are very good at turning The home into a palliative care facility. And, you know, we'd like people to be at home with the people they love rather than in a cold hospital at the end of their lives. So um, yeah, we do the whole thing.

R

Rob Mineault 20:14

Yeah, I mean, it really sounds like you know, right from, you know, kindergarten to old age, you guys are involved in the lives of many of these people.

A

Alanna Hendren 20:22

Yes, well, from birth, actually, our infant development program will go out there at birth, and then they work with primarily moms, to show them how they can manipulate the child physically so that it can speed up, there's a cold development and sort of the connection between the brain and the body. They also work with children who have fetal alcohol syndrome, narcotic addiction syndrome, we have a partnership with Women's Hospital right now, they have a fantastic program for women who use substances. And so in the past, if you had been branded an addict, what would happen is that the ministry would come and take your baby away from you at birth, what they decided to do is try to keep women together with their infants, and have both of them detox together in the hospital. And so what we do is we work in and out of the hospital is caring for the mom and helping her get her life on track. We work with the moms and the babies to show them how they can maximize the potential of their infants. And we help them build that infant bond. And then as they leave the hospital, our workers go with them into the community to make sure that, you know, everything's stable at home, and the kids are all good. So it's very exciting, particularly the early development stuff, because we know that for every \$7 a society spends on infant development. Or sorry, for every dollar that society spends on

infant development, you save \$7 down the road and future costs, and you have a child that can go into school and not even be labeled with special needs in some cases.

R

Rob Mineault 22:16

So that's a lot to bite off. How big is the organization?

A

Alanna Hendren 22:21

We have almost 500 employees, and we serve about 1000 people a year.

R

Rob Mineault 22:30

So and you know, with it's such a such a storied organization to going back so far, I'm assuming that you guys have have had to pivot a lot. Over the years as different different funding has become available, or even different, you know, federal strategies on how to how to handle Developmental Disabilities has sort of come to pass.

A

Alanna Hendren 22:58

Absolutely, absolutely. A lot of agencies chase money, which I call it chasing money, the federal or the provincial government will come up with a new idea. And then they'll fund a certain program, they didn't find any more. And so all of a sudden, that's the way the whole sector goes. And you know that that goes for us as well. But because we've been an advocacy Association, as well, a lot of the changes that governments have made over the years have been progressive, and they were supported by the Association. So for example, we used to have segregated childcare is because families who had kids with with developmental or intellectual or cognitive disabilities, some of whom also had mental health disorders, or physical disabilities, they had nowhere to send their kids. So we opened up segregated child cares. But then over time integration took over. And so now all of our child cares are integrated, which means that 25% of the kids might have disabilities, but the other 75% are all just typical kids, and they get great childcare service because it's an enhanced learning environment. The same thing with employment, employment, employing people with developmental disabilities in the community, didn't really come around until the 1980s. And it was sort of just piloted, whereas now, the federal government, provincial government aren't really pushing employment for everyone. So we have focused on employment very much over the last 20 years. So yeah, you're absolutely right. We've had to grow and evolve with society and societal perceptions and societal goals.

R

Rob Mineault 24:48

And so you know, we've we've talked here on the podcast before about sort of the the move to further inclusion lately. Has that been the Organization's experience to like, are we kind of in a little bit of a golden age, say, for inclusion right now?

A

Alanna Hendren 25:07

I hope so. A lot of debate has been happening about what inclusion even mean. So generally, this debate happens around the school system to say, Well, you know, these kids are integrated, but they're not included. And then now the discussion is about, well, they can be included, but do they really belong? So you can get caught up in a lot of these words, what we want is a community where everyone belongs, not just people with developmental disabilities, but everybody should be included in the communities where we live and work and play. And that's what our association stands for. I think governments have really come along, the provincial governments just introduced some accessibility legislation, the city of Vancouver has a great accessibility committee, that's going to be doing some public consultations on how we can make our communities more accessible for everyone. And I think that we're on the right track, because the more all of us participate, the more diverse and the more exciting of a society that we're gonna have.

R

Rob Mineault 26:20

It's also interesting, being an organization that that has been around for so long, because you can you can sort of point to different strategies and and recognize the successes and the failures in them. Are you sort of able to point to something like integration, and, and say, Look, you know, somebody who, you know, a child who's who's integrated, and who is brought up in, in a, in a positive atmosphere, throughout their, their education, and then, you know, sort of streamlined into, into, you know, an inclusive job, you know, as part of an exclusive strategy, like, are you sort of able to point to that and go, this is a real, this is a success story. And this is how the system should be built?

A

Alanna Hendren 27:13

Well, you know, I'm old enough that I was around when we closed institutions. So a lot of people these days, don't even know that people lived in institutions. So in the past, so I'm talking about, you know, the 1930s 40s 50s 60s 70s, if you had a child with a disability, very often the doctor would tell you to put this child in an institution and forget that you ever had them, people with developmental disabilities, when, when viewed through the eugenics lens. And eugenics was a theory that said that, you know, essentially all people

who were deficient in some way should be locked away so that the rest of us can essentially live our lives. When they were seeing that way. They were essentially almost human refuse, I mean, being locked in institutions that were understaffed, undervalued, the staff there were undervalued. When the institutions were at their peak, over 6000, people with developmental disabilities were locked away for life, without any due process or without break, breaking the law. And very often babies would just be dropped at the institution doorways because the parents didn't understand how to look after them. And because there were no resources in the community. So I had the wonderful experience of working on closure of institutions, and essentially taking people who lived who had been locked up for so long, and I'm talking, you know, very, very scarce staff on wards of 30 to 60 people. And so when we moved everybody out out of the institution, and welcomed them into homes in the community, there was an immediate effect there, you know, immediately people started behaving like they belonged in the community. At first, a lot of people wouldn't be able to open a door, they'd stand at the door, and wait for somebody to open it because they never opened a door in their whole life. They needed a nurse to open a door with a key and let them in or out. So that was the real big game changer is once we closed the institution, then all people with developmental disabilities were going to be supported in their community. And unlike mental health, which is a bit of a different story. The government's did invest quite a bit of money in developing the community to include people with cognitive disability disabilities. In the terms of when they close Riverview and their psychiatric facilities. The problem was is that they closed the institutions but they didn't invest in community Mental Health. And so then you have a lot of people that are living on the street or otherwise in need of care. Who who don't yet. So I think that the system right now for people with developmental disabilities is good. I think that it's quite well resourced. I worry about escalating demand in the future, because we also experience this huge uptick in people with autism. That started about 20 to 15 years ago. And that's going to increase the demand on a service delivery system. That is barely meeting demand right now. And we did prove like I have to say, in the beginning, when we first started community living, we opened up a few group homes around the province, a lot of people said, this is not possible, you can't possibly move these people into the community, and expect them to adapt and fit in, and so on. So we were always proving that this was a good concept and a better way for people to live. And now, of course, we're proving that not only can people go to inclusive child cares, they can go to inclusive schools, they can go to inclusive work programs, and learn how to become employed, which is what all of us want for our kids. So I think it's been huge and inclusive, education was huge as well, when kids started going to school with typical kids, then they started acting like typical kids. So everybody's efforts, and it's a lot of efforts over the last decades, I think, are really paying off today. And I hope they just only get better. How important is educating the public to the organization, educating the public is very important. But most of a lot of the education of the public has really happened by way of

the people that we support, living in the community, working in the community and showing everybody what's possible. So I think they're probably the best educators, all we're really asking for is a chance. This is a group of folks who through no fault of their own, are born with barriers to their future. And I think that we live in a wonderful society here, to have so many people who are very welcoming, and where we don't have a lot of horrible stigma, as they do in many other countries. So we are, I think, probably one of the best areas in the world to live in if you have a developmental disability.

R

Rob Mineault 32:47

Yeah, I mean, certainly in the in the last 10 years or so the you know, the football has definitely been driven forward in terms of being able to have conversations about you know, everything from, say mental health to, you know, developmental disabilities, you know, you hear more and more conversations about things like autism and all the gradients of, of the condition. So, so I agree with you completely, I think that we really are headed to to a much better space than we were even 20 years ago.

A

Alanna Hendren 33:20

Yes, yes, of course, it all depends on on government commitment. And that's probably the weakness of our system is that when you look all over the world, and you look at services for people who are disadvantaged in any way, first of all, the country or the province has to have enough money to be able to dedicated to support of the more vulnerable. And it has to have the political will. And we are very fortunate that we have a political will, in British Columbia that we we do look at supporting disadvantaged people, particularly people with developmental disabilities, I think we could do a lot better with a number of other groups out there who really need our support right now.

R

Rob Mineault 34:11

Yeah, that was actually going to be my next question. You know, in terms of some of the challenges that the organization might face, I'm sure that you're you're no different from many other organizations that are like yours, in the sense of funding is, is gonna be a really a really big obstacle to overcome because we, we don't always have the greatest funding for these types of programs. Can you speak a little bit to that?

A

Alanna Hendren 34:37

Well, I can speak from the point of view of the developmental disabilities organization. We had a business I'm not sure if you remember it, you might have seen our trucks running

around the community picking up used clothing for Value Village we, we picked up the use clothing and then we sold it to Value Village. So that provided us with revenue that we could use To fill in those areas where government funding was not adequate. So technology is a big area that that we invested that funding. And so because we're a very business like organization, generally, we don't have some of the funding pressures that other organizations might have. Because we have sort of assumed control of our own destiny in some areas. Having said that, my big fear is not for the organization. It's for individuals and families, about 20 years ago, around 2000, was the Liberal government. And what they brought in was individualized funding. So instead of block funding agencies, they wanted to fund individuals, and then those individuals would, in theory, have choices about where they could go and purchase their services, we haven't totally flipped to a free market system, primarily because there's not a lot of competition to provide services to people who have no money. So we're sort of still skating around with that same concept, though. So now, more responsibility is placed on the family, to raise their child the way they want to raise their child. And then when the child becomes an adult, if the family needs support, and I'm talking about, you know, some children grow up to be adults with huge health barriers, some kids are in wheelchairs, and will be for life, others need to lay prone, sometimes, for a great percentage of their day. Some have huge behavior problems that provide a barrier to inclusion, and sometimes to the safety of others. Now, I'm just talking on the extreme ends. But if you were a parent, and you had to deal with this for the rest of your life, you would need some support. So my concern for the future is will families get the kinds of individualized supports they need? Will we have enough funding to meet those needs? And will we have enough family support programs and opportunities in the community to help those families go through transitions, the big transitions for families are from, you know, infancy, into kindergarten, and then from high school into the regular world of work, and so on. So my concern is that the number one problem for people with any kind of disability, but particularly developmental disability, is poverty. Because if they are up to their own devices, and don't have, you know, the skills or the abilities to work, then basically, they're 100% reliant on the government. And, you know, even even the folks who do work very often can only work for a day or two a week. So they need that extra funding from somebody other than their families, because some of the services are very expensive, and families unless they were extremely wealthy would not be able to pay for them on their own. Right. So my concern for the future is less with the organization and more with, you know, what's going to happen to individuals that with disabilities, the biggest challenge, one of the biggest challenges facing the organization and being able to recruit and retain employees, because, again, government funding doesn't pay for really top salaries for people who work with vulnerable folks.

 R Ryan Fleury 38:36

In talking about services and support, you know, I have to ask the question that we ask many of our guests, and that relates to the pandemic, you know, has it shown your organization holes in the systems that you were never noticed before? Because of this pandemic?

A

Alanna Hendren 38:55

Yes, I think all of us have probably seen holes in in just the way societies operating with the pandemic. The the really exciting news about DDA is that we had been investing in technology before the pandemic hit. So we had purchased technology, we had pushed the staff in the organization to go online and put as many of our resources online, we also hired under Cisco, somebody who's an expert in assistive technology, and had already been working with some of the individuals that we support, determining what kind of technology can we use, that would make life easier for this person or help them get a job. And so a lot of people with with cognitive and developmental disabilities have very poor language, or express that, you know, it's hard for them to express themselves. So there are so many apps out there now, for communication for kids, for adults. And so we have the capacity Now we have two people in our system technology department. And what they do is they research a lot of the UPS, they buy a lot of things that are almost like toys, you know, things like heated, heated blankets that people can put on Wade blankets that help some people sleep better. So sort of the lower tech all the way up to the higher tap. So I don't know if you're familiar with some of the old methods of communication assistance, that aren't folks God, but they were these Dyna boxes that were kind of archaic and difficult to use. While now we've got these great communication apps. So we were ready to flip online quite quickly, we didn't have to close any of our services, we had to implement a lot of new policy around wearing PPE, and we had to monitor our group homes and one of our group homes did get infected with COVID, which was, you know, very dramatic, because all their staff and all the clients got sick. And it was at the very beginning. So we had to rush to make up rules because the bureaucracy hadn't really dealt with it. So we were very fortunate just because we have the technology, and we had the know how to flip everything online. We did notice, we have a number of people who come to us from for support during the day, but they live with elderly parents. So we could have somebody who's 60, who's living with mom and dad and their 82 and 85. So what we had to do in those cases was buy food for the family and drop it off. You know, mom just got out of the hospital on dad just had a bad fall. So again, it's not so much PDA that concerns me. It's the precarious nature of a lot of people who A lot of you know, parents who look after their kids with developmental disabilities well into their 80s. And sometimes they aren't, you know, necessarily up to it. So we just flipped in adapted to that helped out as much as we could. But food delivery ended up being quite important during first lockdown. Yeah.



Steve Barclay 42:25

What are the housing opportunities, like for people with developmental disabilities? Are there are Is there much in the way of group homes? What's the demand, like on the social housing that is available?



Alanna Hendren 42:39

Well, that is just a great question. Um, the people who we support, and the family who we support, unfortunately, have the same problems accessing public housing as everybody else does. So during the, when the liberals first came into power, a lot of social housing was privatized, they stopped building social housing. We, we saw homelessness start to really, you know, like, you couldn't ignore it anymore. It was everywhere. And and that continues. So for people who need affordable housing, it's very difficult when all you have is about \$400 a month to spend on rent. To find anything for \$400 a month. That's not a total slum, we've actually provided service for people who are living in storage lockers. And one fellow who might be lived in a storage locker for two years, until the company that owns the storage locker was sold, and the new owners told him he had to leave. So housing is an extremely important issue. And again, DDA has a number of group homes, the government was closing group homes at the beginning, and we kept our group homes open, I think we only close one, we actually rent some homes on open market, and that's where semi independent clients live. And then we also support people who live in their own apartments in the community. But those are typically people who also work in addition to you know, getting government benefits. Housing is a huge issue for every disadvantaged person in this province.



Steve Barclay 44:29

Indeed, have been in to see the state and some of the housing too. And, you know, it's it's poorly maintained, rundown, you know, just nasty apartments torn up carpets, holes and walls. It, I see it as something that that's a major failing of our society right now and something that really does need to be addressed.



Alanna Hendren 44:52

Yes, I agree. It's a huge issue. What can what can you do to help people if they're transient Or without a fixed address. I knew the psychiatrists that was working on the Downtown Eastside. He's an amazing psychiatrist, and he went down, and he would see people once a week on the Downtown Eastside. But when I talked to him about it, he said, it's very difficult to follow up, you see somebody wants, and then they never show up again, and

you don't know where they're living. So I think particularly for people with mental health disorders, it's a tragedy, what's happened, and if you're depressed, or you already have a mental health disorder, and you're living in housing, that's filthy, or, you know, filled with a bunch of other people who also don't know what's going on or live in these degrading circumstances, you're just gonna get worse. So I think that, you know, for everybody out there who, you know, can't be a millionaire and buy a house in Vancouver, we need some strategy to, to provide more than 10s. Right?

R

Rob Mineault 46:02

Um, can you talk a little to us a little bit about Starworks, which is the social enterprise that you mentioned earlier, I'm curious to hear a little bit about it, and just kind of how important businesses like this can really be and the strategy behind it?

A

Alanna Hendren 46:19

Well, we had our, our business that made money for DDA, that was our contact with Value Village. And then when, when I first arrived in the late 1990s, I think it was 1997, we had a bunch of sheltered workshops, and a number of them were very rundown, and not very conducive to sort of building a positive image. So my goal was to shut down all these sheltered workshops and replaced them with either programs that would provide recreation and leisure to people whose goals were less focused on employment, or employment programs, or drop ins, or some sort of activity, which was more than sitting there filling, you know, on envelopes with pieces of paper, or packaging, or these other sort of mundane tasks that that people were doing. So as we interviewed everybody and asked them what they really like to do, there were a number of people who had tried competitive employment. And they didn't like it, they felt it was too pressured, or they didn't feel included with their co workers, or it was too stressful. But they, they needed something that was more like work. So what we decided to do was sort of form a little business within DDA, and we called it starworks. And we made it so that the staff and the clients could decide what work they were going to what kind of work they were going to do, and what they were going to how they were going to market themselves. So they decided to stay with the packaging theme. But we also had a contract with BC Hydro, for these these tie wires. And we had a big contract with tourism BC, stopping the their tourism brochures and booklets into into plastic so that they can mail them around the world. Of course, that's gone now because everything's online. Anyhow, they decided they wanted to do packaging, the stuff, figured out how to do marketing. And the goal of star works is to employ people at minimum wage or better. So we don't make any money from it. All of the money that is realized from the program goes back into hiring more people. So the way we work it out is that if we get a contract, we figure out, okay, we can we can

employ 10 people with this contract. And the money essentially goes in wages to those 10 people. And then, you know, sometimes we've been up to 30 people working because we've got a number of contracts. And so we can control the work, you know, we make sure that the work balances with the number of people who we can employ. And our goal is to employ as many people as possible. And what's interesting about Star work is that it's not just people with developmental disabilities anymore. We have a couple people who have long term mental health disorders, who now are in a positive place, they've got good treatment, but they need the shelter, the protection, they need some staff around to support them in order to work. So that's great. That's what Star Wars is all about. And hopefully, people will move on from Star Wars and get a job in the compute in the community. But for some people a drop in the community is just a little too much pressure.

R

Ryan Fleury 49:56

How receptive have you found employers to be?

A

Alanna Hendren 50:00

Well, they, what we do is we approach companies, and we get them to give us work that we can do at our star works job site. Okay, so those, you know, we got involved in networks of socially responsible social suppliers, stuff like that. So it's gone, it's gone really well, in terms of our employment program, we run jobs West, which is all it does get people jobs. And it has expanded quite a bit over the years, because we also subcontract with work VC, in a number of areas, all the way up to quote unquote, Whitlam actually, to get people jobs. And we have found employers in Vancouver to be very receptive. Now one of the reasons is economic, our guys will work for minimum wage, whereas many people in Vancouver don't work for minimum wage. So we can provide very stable employees that will stay for a long time, even if they're just making minimum wage. And some of our folks have gone on, we had one guy who worked at the hotel Vancouver for 35 years, because he'd been placed a long time ago, and we've had other people work at McDonald's for 20 years and places like that. So a big selling point we have is that we can provide competent workers who will stick around, even at minimum wage rates.

R

Ryan Fleury 51:35

And I think that's something we've seen in cross disability fields, you know, I'm totally blind myself and grateful to have a job. And so, you know, people who face an impairment of some sort, have to fight so much harder, prove themselves so much more, that they're capable of doing the job. And then when they get the job, chances are, they're going to be a lot more reliable, stable, stay longer loyal. You know, and then what you just said, kind of

proves that out.

A

Alanna Hendren 52:07

Yes, yes. And totally about the loyalty. I mean, we have some folks that are such company, people, it's unbelievable, because they find your sense of family, you know, like many of us do, in the work that we choose. So, you know, I'm all for it. I think people with disabilities are great workers, for a number of reasons. And that's, and that's one of them is when they find a job that they really like, they stay, and they're very proud and show up for work early, leave late, if that's necessary. We're seeing a lot more people working retail. And that's really exciting too. Because of course, in order to work retail, you have to have super good personal hygiene yourself. And we've also found a lot of people in the retail community, a lot of the retail workers are very supportive, and happy to help out. So it's, I think it's just fantastic. And I hope that our unemployment situation stays relatively low, so we can keep this going. And I think that a lot of the employers are very positive been actually, you know, we have good word of mouth as well.

R

Ryan Fleury 53:25

Yeah, I definitely think people's perception of persons with disabilities is changing for the better.

A

Alanna Hendren 53:31

That's our slogan for a while know is that perception is our biggest disability, right? Yeah. Great. Thank you so much for the opportunity.

R

Ryan Fleury 53:43

Well, you can't go just yet we got to find out where people can go online to find out more information.

A

Alanna Hendren 53:48

Okay, well, no more can go to <https://www.develop.bc.ca/> And we also have social media channels that you can get referred to from there. And if nobody's dropping by these days, but in the future, if you're ever in the neighborhood in Richmond, we'd really be happy to see you if you want to just drop by.

- R** Rob Mineault 54:20
Wonderful. Hey, listen, thanks for taking some time out of your day to talk to us and, and best of luck in the future.
- A** Alanna Hendren 54:26
Thank you. Same to you guys.
- R** Rob Mineault 54:30
Man, I can't get over how big that organization is. I had no idea like 500 employees. Wow.
- S** Steve Barclay 54:36
Yeah, I had no idea. They're that big either. That's astounding.
- R** Ryan Fleury 54:40
And it has some assistant assistive technology trainers that we need to reach out to and see if we can do anything with them.
- R** Rob Mineault 54:49
Yeah. But you know, is this the whole housing situation like especially here in Vancouver, it's just it. It's so frustrating. I can just imagine how difficult you know the housing situation is for for the organization.
- R** Ryan Fleury 55:11
It's gonna be so I don't know enough about these sorts of topics. I have opinions that are aren't based on anything intelligible. But you know, when you hear the government say they're going to spend \$16 billion on this pipeline that the liberals approved. And we got people living in tents and parks. We have a problem. Yeah.
- R** Rob Mineault 55:32
Ryan



Ryan Fleury 55:33

Rob,



Rob Mineault 55:34

Where can people find us?



Ryan Fleury 55:37

They can find us online at atbanter.com.



Rob Mineault 55:41

They can also drop us an email if they so desire, especially if you've ever heard the word scut before, I would like to hear from you. cowbell@atbanter.com



Steve Barclay 55:54

And if you really want to converse about scut with a lot of other people, you can do it on social media and join us at Facebook or Twitter.



Rob Mineault 56:04

Alright, everybody that is going to do about do it for us Big thanks to Alanna Hendren for joining us. Big thanks to you for listening, and we will see everybody next week.