

(LET’S’ logo, a lightbulb made of speech bubbles.
Also looks like a hot air balloon.)

Live Educate Transform Society (LET’S)
September - October 2023

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Accessibility Audits

Jewish Family Services - Community Garden

LET'S was recommended to the garden coordinator of the Vancouver Jewish Community Garden. LET'S was asked to do a walking tour of the garden and make accessibility suggestions.

The Vancouver Jewish Community Garden was established in 2020 through a collaborative effort by Vancouver Talmud Torah, Congregation Beth Israel, and Jewish Family Services and made possible by the Diamond Foundation. The Diamond Foundation secured a long-term lease of this land for future development and is allowing the land to be used on a temporary basis.

We had a good walking tour. We were fortunate that it rained before and after the walking tour but not during. Throughout our walk, we noted accessibility facilitators and barriers. We explained what improvements we suggested and who the changes would benefit. We were impressed with the thought that had already been given to accessibility.



(Illustration of flowers of varying colours amid grass.)

North Vancouver Queer Prom

A group of high school students in North Vancouver had their application accepted for an “It Gets Better” grant to do a Queer Prom and a series of events leading up to the main event. The club aims to be a safe space for queer students, allies and faculty. During their meetings they have discussions, do crafts, plan events, drink tea, share queer history and culture, and more. They have been working throughout the year to establish connections between queer youth groups to create more teamwork, a greater sense of community and ultimately a stronger fight against anti-queer discrimination in schools.

LET’S is helping with organizing, providing 2SLGBTQIA+ history, providing low sensory spaces, and doing an accessibility audit of the venue. We went to The Pipe Shop in North Vancouver, with the students and support teacher, to review the site and how best to arrange the Queer Prom. The venue is mainly accessible with accessible washrooms. The main accessibility issue is parking. It is near transit. We helped the students envision where to place the various compartments of the event and where best to locate the low sensory space. We also talked about safety and security to ensure the participants are able to focus on enjoying the event. We look forward to continuing to work with this keen group of students as we move closer and closer to the Queer Prom.

Advocacy and Moderation

Save Out HandyDART! Virtual Town Hall

LET’S moderated the Save Our HandyDART! Virtual Town Hall in September. Save Our HandyDART is a coalition of riders, disability advocates, labour groups, community organizations, and attendees.The Save Our HandyDART coalition is advocating for change in a variety of ways, including speaking with government representatives.

The Town Hall was called to talk about concerns about Translink’s increased use of taxis to perform HandyDART trips

and the service's lack of public accountability. Over 100 people attended the Town Hall.

Coalition members described severe safety issues with taxis, including instances in which riders were injured getting in and out of taxis, had their wheelchairs improperly secured, or were even left on the street by taxi drivers who did not provide door-to-door assistance.



(Image: Illustration of yellow taxi with cityscape in background.)

Following is an example of the impassioned speeches shared by HandyDART riders. Mary Deane states:

"I have been using taxi services for a while because of HandyDART transportation. Taxi services are terrible, the drivers are not willing to help at all, they stay in their cars, they refuse to move forward the passenger seat so that I could access the back seat , having just had a complete knee replacement surgery done and could not get in tight spaces.

They cause me so much pain because of their unwillingness to help the passenger. Also they want you to sign the receipt without putting the right amount on. A few of the people attending day care programs have the same issue over and over. I requested to add in my file no taxi services ever. HandyDART drivers are very kind, helpful, they treat with care, friendly. I love my HandyDART drivers, they are the best."

You can access testimonials from HandyDART users in video form, and also read a report prepared by Ecopath Planning on the access issues facing HandyDART users. A petition to end the use of taxis as fill-in for HandyDART services can be signed here, and a survey about your experience with HandyDART services is available here.

The Town Hall event was a success and a great beginning for this ongoing conversation. LET'S will keep you updated as the action continues.

Consulting

Period Promise Campaign at United Way

United Way's Period Promise campaign increases access to free menstrual products in communities so that everyone who menstruates can go to work, get to school, access services, and stay connected to their community.

LET’S was contacted by the Capacity Building Specialist of the campaign. They are speaking with a variety of organizations to make sure their work continually meets community needs. After conversing with a LET’S staff member, the campaign supplied LET’S with free reusable and disposable menstrual products to give out at our low sensory spaces. They are hoping to get some useful information on participants’ experiences using reusable menstrual products, with the goal that this data will inform future policy changes that address period poverty in BC, and ultimately help to better serve our communities.



(Illustrations of menstrual products, including calendar, pads, tampons, menstrual cup, underwear, and the pill.)

As more public policy gets written around access to menstrual products, the campaign hopes to better understand what impact reusable products can have as part

of building long-term solutions. To this end, they are building a research concept in partnership with community organizations who offer support to those demographics that disproportionately experience period poverty in BC: people living with disabilities, Indigenous peoples, and families making less than $40,000 a year.
They are seeking potential partners to work with. LET'S is planning an event with them for the Spring. More information to come.

SHINE-ADI

LET'S contributed to Realize Canada's research project titled STBBI, HIV and Hepatitis C Innovations for a New Era – Assessing Determinants of Inclusion (SHINE-ADI). The project aims to understand impacts on organizations' ability to plan or implement policies and programs that respond to Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV), Hepatitis C Virus (HCV), and Sexually Transmitted and Blood Borne Infections (STBBI) among older adults, people living with disabilities and/or the d/Deaf community in Canada. LET'S was happy to contribute to the project by completing the survey. We will share the research findings once they've been released.

Conversations

Accessibility and Public Transportation

Heather McCain, LET'S' executive director, was interviewed by two students at Carnegie Mellon University who are doing a project on accessibility and public transportation. During

our conversation we talked about this currently under review paper, of which Heather is a co-author: "Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Public Transit: A Case-study Analysis of Canada and US Policies". The paper applies a Disability Policy Lens to local, provincial/state, and national transportation policies in Canada and the United States. We also talked about the history of CAN, why the organization was started, accessibility and transportation, and how transportation has evolved since CAN started. The students asked a lot of questions about how transportation has improved and the work that LET'S has done in order to keep pressure on TransLink to make changes, engage with our communities, and where we see transit in the future.



(Image: A blind person, with a white cane, is holding onto the railing in the accessible spot of public transportation.)

Cross Cultural Walking Tours

LET'S' executive director Heather McCain participated in two Cross Cultural Walking Tours in September 2023. On the tours, Heather drew awareness to Marsha P. Johnson and Johnson's disability activism, as often disability is left out of the gay and trans rights conversation.

Cross Cultural Walking Tours bring awareness of the contributions of Indigenous and early immigrant communities, the richly layered history of Vancouver's downtown eastside neighbourhoods (including Jewish Strathcona, Hogan's Alley, Downtown Eastside, Chinatown and Paueru-Gai), in celebration of Asian and Jewish Heritage Months in May. This educational grassroots program dives into the systemic oppression, racism, displacement and impact of urban renewal experienced by many marginalized communities THEN and NOW, sharing history and stories together in one tour.

Founded and coordinated by Carmel Tanaka with guidance from an Advisory Committee, the *Cross Cultural Walking Tours* program has since engaged 40+ partners in its annual May celebration and offers year-round private, classroom and corporate tours upon request.

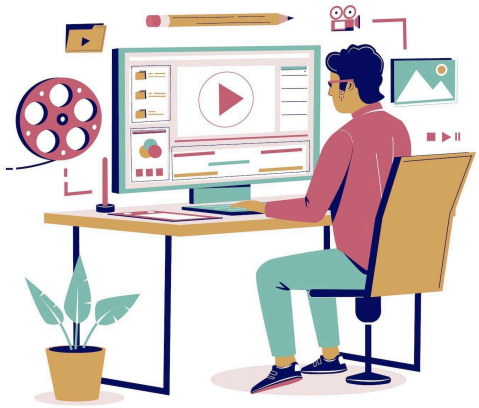
This isn't the first time Heather and LET'S have partnered with Carmel Tanaka and the Cross Cultural Walking Tours and hopefully it's not the last!

Focus Groups

WildBrain

LET'S hosted a focus group for staff with disabilities and who are neurodivergent, as well as two workshops for staff at WildBrain, a television and production studio that makes content geared towards children and families. The conversations went well and folks were very open and honest

about their experiences with ableism within the company, including experiencing a lack of understanding and awareness of the needs of disabled employees from management, pressure from management to perform during serious health issues, and performative inclusivity and “well-being” initiatives. These conversations informed an Accessibility Report that was provided to WildBrain.



(Illustration of person working at computer, surrounded by media imagery.)

Low Sensory Spaces

LET’S hosted low sensory spaces for a variety of events, including AdvoCon, Camp Normie, and Vancouver Writers Festival. These low sensory sensory spaces were very well used and loved. We noticed that a lot of the event volunteers really engage with and enjoy our spaces, and also often identify as neurodivergent. Many event attendees thanked us for providing a safe space to stim and regroup.

AdvoCon

AdvoCon is an annual education advocacy conference organized by the BCEdAccess Society, a grassroots, BC non-profit society and Canadian charitable organization. The organization's focus is action for equitable access to education, and they are led by the population they serve - disabled people, BIPOC, 2SLGBTQIA+, and other people in protected classes under human rights. Some people with ADHD came together in the low sensory space and had a great connective conversation.

Response was such that LET'S was hired by an attendee for a later event at Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

Camp Normie

LET'S facilitated a low sensory space for Normie Corp Event Society's first multi-day festival, Camp Normie, which took place at The Birdhouse in Vancouver in September 2023. Normie was founded in 2020 amidst the pandemic lockdown, bringing community together safely online. They create nightlife and music based events by, featuring, and for 2SQTBIPOC people in the Lower Mainland.

The event was a success. We had participants who thanked us for being there. Some said that they wouldn't have been able to stay as long, while others said they would have less overwhelm to recover from. We were happy to be there for them.

Our low sensory toys were popular with neurodivergent and non-neurodivergent attendees alike.



(2 photos. 1st is of an attendee knitting in the low sensory space. 2nd photo shows attendee modeling what they'd knit by night's end.)

Vancouver Writers Festival

Vancouver Writers Fest (VWF) is one of the largest and most prestigious annual literary festivals in North America. Through year-round programming, the organization connects people to exceptional books, ideas, and dialogue that ignites a passion for words and the world around us.

Heather is on the VWF accessibility committee, where they are trying to improve access and provide access-related feedback to the organization. For the first time, LET'S offered

a low sensory space at the festival, albeit in a less-than-ideal location for such a space. We've provided feedback that the location needs to be more centralized and properly singaged. LET'S had many great conversations with festival volunteers about the need for low sensory spaces. The volunteers were very inquisitive, especially about our stim toys! Some of the volunteers were also teachers and that led to productive conversations about stim toys in schools. We were excited by the enthusiasm of the staff and volunteers and we're in further talks with the festival to include funding for a better located and supported space for future festivals. We hope other festivals follow suit and incorporate low sensory spaces in their events.

Media

HandyDART Activism

LET'S continues to engage in advocacy around improving HandyDART services and TransLink accessibility. Global News has a video about the concerns raised over HandyDART's increasing reliance on taxis to provide HandyDART services and then another video on TransLink's accessibility plan that was released amid these concerns. As mentioned in the videos, concerns include the lack of training that some taxi drivers have regarding properly supporting disabled riders, the harmful and disrespectful behavior that some taxi drivers display towards disabled riders, limits on the number of taxis disabled riders can use per month, and the lack of external

oversight or a proper complaint mechanism for the outsourced rides.

Disability Training for Airline Staff

LET'S' executive director, Heather McCain, was interviewed in this video piece by CityNews, calling for improved training for airline staff around how to best support disabled passengers. As Heather states: "How are you going to address ableism and create accessibility when you don't know what the broad spectrum of disability encompasses, and how disability is affected by ableism, stigma, and prejudice." In the video, disabled passengers discuss how they've been harmed by poorly trained airline staff. Ryan Lachance is a wheelchair user who described being dropped, twice, by Air Canada staff, stating "I'm not human cargo, I'm a person."



(Illustration of a white and blue airplane.)

The Power of Peer Support for Queer and Disabled People

Online, independent news outlet *The Tyee* featured LET'S and Chronically Queer (CQ) in this article about building community, connecting, and belonging. CQ is a

peer-facilitated support group for 2SLGBTQIA+ people who are neurodivergent, mad, crip, chronically ill, and/or disabled. The article chronicles how LET'S took over the facilitation of CQ and speaks to how ableism manifests in community organizations, especially those experiencing high turnover within leadership. As Harmony states in the article: "Every time I thought I found a chosen family, or I thought I found a group within which I could be myself, it ended up not meeting the requirements I needed," Bongat says. Chronically Queer was the place that finally fit.

Research

Realize Research on Episodic Disabilities and Employment

LET'S has been working with Realize Canada on a research project looking at episodic disabilities and employment. Heather worked with Bastion Marshall and Alfiya Battalova, with assistance from Kale Gösen (from Humanize Consulting), to conduct 46 1-hour long interviews followed by compiling and writing a final report that focused on the experiences of queer and trans folks with episodic disabilities in Ontario and British Columbia and employment. Bastion Marshall is a disabled, queer, non-binary, neurospicy 'Spoonie'. They are passionate about social justice and do crisis volunteering for people who are 2SLGBTQIA+, neurodivergent, disabled, and/or dealing with chronic illness. Alfiya is a researcher with a background in disability studies. She conducts qualitative and quantitative research that

focuses on health equity, access to postsecondary education, community engagement, and disability policies. Kale is white, queer, cis-gender and disabled, and is devoted to anti-oppression work. She is an activist and educator who has spoken in front of thousands of people over the past decade.

Here are some examples of what participants said in their research interviews:

“I have been so accustomed to being chronically under-supported in my life that I often forget to look and believe that there are resources out there for me.”

(Teacher talking about being an adult with ADHD) “Given so much information about mental health and neurodivergence for students but no reflection for how we talk about our own careers. It’s cool that we are learning about it for students but alienating to not have conversations about it for teachers. I can’t talk about how she can’t genuinely cannot keep up.”

“Have experienced racism and other forms of discrimination in disability spaces and trans spaces or BIPOC only spaces. Hasn’t been easy to find space where all of my identities can show up and be okay.”

(From a participant who has been both moderator and admin on Vancouver Queer Spoon Share): “Proud of how it has grown and how it helps people like me who have needs. The

ways I meet people have ripples and connections and widen understanding of who I am.”

“As far as other identities, I believe that Fat or Person in a Large Body is relevant as I believe I have endured stigma and discrimination based on the size of my body and assumptions about my health in relation to body size in the workplace as well as within social services.”

“Trying to navigate any services with a doctor has been horrific. I’m exhausted”

“Without all this ableism, I wouldn't be treated as a problematic, disordered, crisis that needs to be solved all the time.”

“I feel ‘non-compliant' in the social service sector. My non-negotiable needs are seen as demanding. I am a limp and tired human.”

“I think things like higher wages, working conditions, work/life balance, and benefits are all so much more important than just "having a job" and all determine how long people like us are actually able to stay at the job.”

“Most people providing service to the community are burnt out.”

“A disabled group interview was up 2 flights of stairs, no elevators – they asked why I didn’t come and I explained the stairs and they said that never occurred to them.”



(Illustration of a person in a wheelchair in front of stairs.)

It was interesting to hear about the intersection between other identities and disability. As one research participant said, “Disability and queerness are still treated as 2 separate things but there is such crossover. When I saw this study, I was excited because the venn diagram came together.” LET’S has an ongoing relationship with Realize, and we will be updating about this project in future newsletters as more events happen to disseminate the findings of this research.

Workshops

AdvoCon

As mentioned in the Low Sensory Spaces section of this newsletter, AdvoCon is an annual education advocacy conference organized by the BCEdAccess Society, a grassroots, BC non-profit society and Canadian charitable

organization. The organization's focus is action for equitable access to education, and they are led by the population they serve - disabled people, BIPOC, 2SLGBTQ+, and other people in protected classes under human rights. In addition to the Low Sensory Space that LET'S offered at AdvoCon, we also hosted a Disability Awareness workshop that was attended by many educators and self-advocates.

Bakau Consulting

LET'S hosted a Disability Awareness workshop in October 2023 as part of Bakau Consulting's Facilitation Certificate Program (FCP). Bakau Consulting is a full-service equity, inclusion and anti-racism consulting company. Their FCP is a 3-month content-rich program teaching essential skills for inclusive facilitation. It begins by strengthening fundamentals of anti-oppression, equity, and inclusion and then progresses into skills-based training. LET'S has offered our Disability Awareness workshop twice a year for multiple years to the FCP at Baku. As always, we had a small but engaged audience that asked many thoughtful questions. We are looking forward to a sustained and meaningful relationship with the folks at Baku.

City of Vancouver

LET'S has been working with the City of Vancouver on a variety of ongoing workshops. These workshops vary in length and have been delivered to different departments. In September 2023 we held our first full day workshop for the city with staff from various departments including planning,

plumbing, and libraries. This workshop was well received and there was engaged conversation with the attendees.

We also held a shorter workshop with the City Leadership Team about disability awareness. The City Leadership Team includes the city manager, deputy city managers, and the heads of major service groups. Attendees were very participatory with activities.

There were great discussions about the materials presented. For example, the question of who gets to set the parameters of who and what is professional led to a robust discussion around expectations of professionalism and how there is often not a critical eye turned towards where these expectations come from.

People enthusiastically enjoyed the stim tools. At all of our workshops we provide stim toys for people to experience and use. They are good way to model how accessibility doesn't have to be big to be impactful.

Stim tools change the atmosphere by inviting play and this helps to challenge "professionalism" in a workshop space and encourages people to relax and engage differently in the workshop space.

We're developing online courses for City of Vancouver folks who are not able to come to in-person workshops, as well as providing people with materials to review in advance.



(Photo of Karen Fry, Vancouver's Fire Chief, a workshop participant. She is holding her water bottle, which has, among other stickers, a tactile sensory sticker from LET'S.)

Homelessness Services Association of British Columbia

LET'S presented a workshop titled "Call to Action: Being Actively Anti-Ableist" for the Homelessness Services Association of British Columbia (HSABC) at their annual conference in September 2023. This conference brings together over 200 homelessness service providers from across BC to engage in shared learning opportunities. This year's conference themes focused on professional development, peer perspectives, and social justice issues and the conference had a variety of activities designed to improve quality of care, support health and wellness, and strengthen the homelessness serving sector. As mentioned in the

conference program, “Our Disability Awareness workshops gives you the tools to understand what disability is, the types of disability, the current language of disability, what ableism is, how you can actively work to fight against it, and tips for disabled people and allies alike to better ensure equity in all that you do.”

Vancouver Writers Festival

In addition to the Low Sensory Space mentioned earlier in this newsletter, LET’S offered Disability Awareness Front Line Training to volunteers of the Vancouver Writers Festival. This training included guidelines for how to support disabled attendees including guiding access, interacting with folks who use mobility devices, etc. This is the second year LET’S has offered this training and this relationship comes from Heather’s position on the Festival’s accessibility committee.

WildBrain

In addition to the report mentioned earlier in this newsletter, LET’S hosted two workshops at WildBrain on Disability Awareness and Neurodivergence at Work. These workshops drew on conversations with staff and the Accessibility Audit report, allowing us to use specific examples from WildBrain’s workspace to discuss particular issues and adaptations. We later provided an Accessibility Walkthrough of the WildBrain office space, which will be mentioned in our next newsletter.