



Society for Students with a Disability

[Annual Report](#)

2023-2024

Created: May 2024

By: Adrean Meuser & Marissa Donaldson

Office Coordinator AND Education & Administration Coordinator

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Territory Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect the lək'wəŋən and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples on whose traditional unceded territory the Society of the Students with a Disability stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day. We seek to continually decolonize all forms of organizing structures and center Indigenous peoples when considering what accessibility looks like.

SSD Team

Staff

Office Coordinator

uvicssd@uvic.ca

Adrean Meuser (they/them) since 2022



Adrean (they/them) is a non-binary uninvited settler who was born on the Okanagan people's lands in the interior of British Columbia. They enjoy experimenting with art mediums, building relationships with flora and fauna, and spending lots of time with their family. They majored in Gender Studies for their bachelors of arts degree at UVic, and have aspirations to return to school to complete a Masters in Public Health & Social Policy. You'll most likely find Adrean at the office in the SSD space, though you may also find them at the Munchie bar grabbing a coffee, or networking with folks in the hallway. Ask them about their pets!

Education & Administration Coordinator

edusd@uvic.ca

Marissa Donaldson (she/they) as of October 2023, formerly Brooklyn Kemp (she/they) from December 2022 to September 2023



Marissa Donaldson (she/they) has been the Education and Administration Coordinator at the SSD since October 2023. They are an invisibly disabled and neurodivergent graduate student. She is currently in her Masters of Arts in Educational Psychology, specializing in Learning, Development, and Instructional Sciences. Her research interests include how folks with

depression experience stereotypes and how those stereotypes impact academics. They have a background in policy work and education, and are a sex educator for elementary aged children on the side. They have a deep love for accessible education and firmly believe that creating more accessible educational environments for disabled students benefits all students in their academic journey. Their portfolio at the SSD includes planning and facilitating workshops, training sessions, and administering all programs. Outside of work, Marissa enjoys geocaching, Pokemon Go, and playing music.

Research & Communications Coordinator

ssdcomm@uvic.ca

Diana Viafara (she/her) as of February 2024, formerly Bella Jacobs (she/her) from October 2022 to January 2024



Diana (she/her) is an international student studying Business Administration. She is Afro-Colombian, a Black woman, and neurodiverse. She pursued Psychology in her undergraduate studies and obtained a Master's degree in Psychology. She has a deep passion for mental health and gender studies, and is eager to support students to the best of her abilities. Currently, she is responsible for communications at SSD, and is enthusiastic about building bridges and connections to bring us closer together as a community. Apart from her work and studies, in her free time, she is a singer in her shower and an aspiring influencer promoting well-being, consent culture, and self-care.

Workstudy Student Coordinators

Media & Marketing - 100 hours

- Charles (SSD workstudy student prior)

Events - 100 hours

- Julia (SSD workstudy student, Executive Council member prior)
- Emma (SSD workstudy student, Council member prior)

Programs & Outreach - 165 hours

- Grace (SSD community member, Executive Council member as of February 29, 2024)

Previous Years:

The UVic Workstudy Program granted us more workstudy hours in the previous year (100, 200, and 300 hours respectively), showing that they have allotted us less hours this fiscal year. This has impacted our capacity as an organization and we are seeking to increase workstudy hours to widen SSD's capacity and network.

Council Members for 2023-24

Voted in at our Annual General Meeting February 28th, 2023

Chairperson

- Julia

Treasurer

- Hannah

Student Liaison

- Emma (voted in at Special General Meeting, previously Victoria since 2023 AGM)

UVSS' SSD Representative

- Cate

International Student Representative

- Faria (voted in at Special General Meeting, previously vacant)

Graduate Student Representative

- Andrea

Secretary

- Anika

General Members at Large (8)

- AJ (Acorn)
- Rowan
- Mya
- Vanessa
- Zack
- Alison
- Jacob
- Alexa

Council Members for 2024-25

Voted in at our Annual General Meeting February 29th, 2024

Chairpersons

- Julia & Hannah

Treasurer

- Grace

Student Liaison

- Acorn (AJ)

UVSS' SSD Representative

- Cate

International Student Representative

- Kush

Graduate Student Representative

- Alison

Secretary

- Anika

General Members at Large (4)

- Mya
- Vanessa
- Lola
- Emma

We have four more positions open for our General Member at Large position. These positions can be elected at our next Special General Meeting.

Summary & Highlights

This year has been very busy at the SSD! From events, field trips, volunteer-led collaborations, buttons and workshops, the SSD has been spotted all over campus and Victoria at large.

Updates

Updated our Constitution over the Summer

In June 2023, we updated our constitution for clarity, grammatical errors, gender-neutral language, and other sundry items. The changes can be found at [this link](#), with additions highlighted in red and subtractions crossed out in red.

Slight changes to Food Security Program for Fall 2023 and Spring 2024

Starting in Fall 2023, we no longer offered increased subsidy funds for grocery reimbursements for students with dependents. All students received a maximum of \$200 for reimbursement funds. With this, we encouraged the purchase of nourishing foodstuffs and did not cover self-medicating or other non-grocery items (i.e. dish soap, toilet paper, medication, energy drinks, etc.). Throughout the last fiscal year, we continued attempts to emphasize the Good Food Box program over the grocery reimbursement option to move away from giving students money directly, and rather provide them tangible food items. In Spring 2024, subscription meal kits were added to be covered under the reimbursement program, and contradictory language regarding the purchase of supplements was removed. A clarification was made that supplements were no longer covered under the program.

Funding Request Pause

The SSD decided to take a pause to reassess the sustainability, accessibility, and equity of the Funding Request program in March 2024. At the time of the pause, we intended to seek solutions to concerns about overspending, as well as seek more sustainable options for the purchase of computer equipment. We also intended to revise the policy and sign up form itself for clarity and alignment, with the goal of the revised program reopening in May 2024. We wanted to establish which students actually need to access our last-resort funding, as we were finding students were applying for the Funding Request Program without going through alternative funding avenues. After a thorough review, we found that the program must be put on pause indefinitely as we do not have the budget to continue the program in its current state.

Programs Pause Statement

Following our funding request pause, with heavy hearts, we announced at the end of April 2024 that our upcoming fiscal year would require a pause on all programming due to financial constraints. This includes an indefinite pause on our Funding Request program, Food Security program, and Accessible Cooking Class. The full statement can be seen below.

Over the past few years, we have seen tremendous growth in our programs' usage; we're so grateful that students are accessing the support they need, but the reality is that our budget limits us from providing as much support as students deserve. We are so privileged to have been able to help students with financial insecurity and unexpected costs associated with disability and rising grocery store costs. However, we are no longer in a financial position to continue supporting these programs. We are seeking more sustainable avenues to continue offering such valuable programming, but for the time being, we have to pause.

The SSD strives to be a space for community with UVic for all disabled students, and the high demand on these programs has also impacted our staff's ability to plan and facilitate community-building activities, as we have been busy assessing the high volume of applicants to both programs. We also deeply believe that community comes from engagement with each other and connection between individuals, and though these programs are so beneficial to students, they can feel more transactional and less relational.

Please continue reading to see more details about each program in particular. We also invite you to complete [this survey](#) to help guide us as we reimagine our programming and community building for the upcoming school year.

Funding Request Program

In order to continue offering support to disabled students, we need to pause this program until we are able to find a sustainable approach to addressing many students' needs. We are

working to create lasting, meaningful sponsorship and donation structures and financial scaffolding to allow for a sustainable, growth-friendly model for this program. We need to revise the previous policy, and create a more streamlined method to address and fulfill requests.

Food Security Program

We empathize that students are facing rising food & living costs, and we acknowledge that students struggle to feed themselves regularly and consistently. We are offering in-space snacks for students who need sustenance while on campus, but we also acknowledge that this doesn't address students who are off-campus. We encourage you to get involved with the UVSS Fed Up campaign, which is calling for increased food security for UVic students; if there is interest, we can also create a committee about how disabled students' are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. We are committed to finding a way forward for this program, and wish to continue supporting students as we can.

Accessible Cooking Classes

We are hoping to find a way to continue hosting our Cooking Class in collaboration with the Health Food Bar. We are searching for a low- or no-cost option for a kitchen on- or off-campus, as well as considering best practices around food, equity & sustainability. This program has a great chance of being funded again in the future as it is an excellent opportunity for skills development and community building, as well as interdependence and food sovereignty.

Program & Community Building Survey

Please go to the following [link](#) to complete a survey to help us decide how to prioritize our future spending based on our community's voice.

Programs

Food security program

Budget:

- Summer 2023: \$15,000
- Fall 2023: \$20,000
- Spring 2024: \$20,000

Actuals:

- Summer 2023: \$11,962.57 (\$3,037.43 under budget)
- Fall 2023: \$13,440.93 (\$6,559.07 under budget)
- Spring 2024: \$19,365.97 (\$634.03 under budget)

Students registering for this program were given two options: Good Food Box and Supplement or Grocery Reimbursement (detailed below). The Food Security Program was our most used program in terms of the quantity of students served in the 2023-2024 fiscal year. As demonstrated by the actuals, there continues to be an increased need for food security amongst students with the rising costs of living and grocery prices. While the SSD acknowledges the Food Security Program is an incredibly useful resource for students, we unfortunately do not have the resources to administer this program in its current state for the 2024-2025 fiscal year. The SSD continues to look at financially sustainable options to bring back the Food Security Program in the future.

Good Food Box and Supplement Option

Where possible, students are encouraged to select the Good Food Box + Supplement option; it supports local community partners as well as provides a variety of healthy produce and dry foods to supply your home with ingredients to create recipes.

Grocery Reimbursement Option

This accessible option is open to all disabled students who don't find the other option fits their nutritional and dietary needs. Students submit their receipts to the Education & Administration Coordinator, who looks over their receipts and determines what is eligible foodstuffs. These totals are then compared to the \$200 max reimbursement amount; if the foodstuffs exceed the \$200 cap, we simply only reimburse the \$200 maximum.

Accessible Cooking Class

In collaboration with Daniel Caron from the Health Food Bar, the SSD launched our Accessible Cooking Class program over the Spring 2024 semester. This program was born out of the need for increased food security amongst students, as well as creating spaces for students to build transferable skills in an accessible setting. The Accessible Cooking program utilized ingredients from the Good Food Box to further promote that option of the Food Security Program and to support local and sustainable consumption. The program took place both online via Zoom and in person at the Fairfield Gonzales Community Association. The SSD invested in tech equipment (camera and wireless microphone) in January 2024 to ensure online and in person participants had similar levels of program experiences and inclusion. This equipment continues to be used for all of our events and programs.

Recipes were sent to participants the day before the class. This timeline was not ideal as it did not give online participants enough notice to get the ingredients that they needed. We had limited time between receiving our Good Food Box for the week and the next cooking class, causing a barrier for both staff and students. In the future, we will aim to send the recipe out earlier to reduce barriers for participants.

A post-program survey was sent to all participants that attended at least one cooking session. We had a 30% response rate on the survey, with all participants saying that an element that they enjoyed the most about the program was communal meal times with their peers. Most participants said that the physical location was a barrier to them, meaning that for future iterations of this program, we will explore other location options closer to campus. Most participants said that they are definitely interested in another iteration of Accessible Cooking Class in the future, with no respondents saying that they were not interested. With this, we can see that this pilot program was a success and the SSD is actively looking towards bringing it back in a more sustainable way.

Workstudy Initiatives

First Annual Mental Health Resource Fair (September 2023)

The Mental Health Resource Fair (MHRF) was organized by Emma, events workstudy student. The intention of this resource fair was to support and connect students to mental health services in the Greater Victoria area. This one-day event took place in the Student Union Building in the Michele Pujol Room with over 20 different organizations in attendance. Multiple other organizations were interested in attending, however did not have capacity due to staffing or volunteer logistics. Throughout the course of the MHRF, hundreds of students visited the organizations on a flow-through basis.

Due to the success of this fair, the SSD plans on making the MHRF an annual event in September. We plan to expand the fair beyond strictly mental health services to also encompass community organizations that can support the wellbeing of students through community care.

The [SSD Mental Health Resource List](#) was born out of the information at this fair. Furthermore, all organizations were asked to send in a short video about their services and community to be posted on the SSD website. We received a \$1,500 grant from the Office of Student Life to transcribe the organization videos into ASL. The SSD is actively working towards contracting ASign to transcribe all videos into ASL prior to them being posted on the website. We hope to have these videos live on the SSD website before the next Mental Health Resource Fair.

De-Stress Fest (February 2024)

In partnership with Friends of Music Society, Julia and Emma (events workstudy students) organized De-Stress Fest, an evening of music and community for students. This event was an open mic night with food, music, and colouring, including a performance from the Friends of Music Ukulelians. De-Stress Fest took place in the Student Union Building in Vertigo Lounge. Approximately 50 students attended De-Stress Fest and the event was positively received.

Peer Support Groups (September 2023 - April 2024)

Julia, events workstudy student, organized another school year of peer support groups. Started in September 2022, peer support groups are intended to be a space for students to come together, share experiences, and find community in their lived experience. This year, the SSD hosted four peer support groups per semester in the Winter Session. Fall 2023 had autism, chronic pain, invisible disabilities, and mental health peer support groups. Spring 2024 had autism, BIPOC and disabled, chronic pain, and mental health peer support groups. The autism peer support group was well attended both terms and we received positive feedback about all the groups in general. Peer support group facilitators were paid an honourarium at the end of each term.

Funding Opportunities

Learning Assistance Program Bursary

Budgeted for \$15,000 over the year
\$3,000 in Summer 2023, \$6,000 in Fal 2023I, \$6,000 in Spring 2024

All funds were distributed by the Centre for Accessible Learning to disabled students who accessed the LAP's services.

Funding Requests

Budgeted \$20,000 per semester (Summer, Fall, and Spring); \$60,000 for the fiscal year (May 2023 - April 2024)

Actual costs:

- Summer 2023: \$25,777.70 (\$5,777.70 over budget)
- Fall 2023: \$25,203.66 (\$5,203.66 over budget)
- Spring 2024: \$12,415.65 (\$7,584.33 under budget. NOTE: midway through this semester, funding requests were put on pause.)

Total spent: \$63,397.01 (\$3,397.01 over budget)

After careful consideration, the SSD decided to pause our Funding Request program indefinitely due to budgetary constraints and a need for a policy overhaul. As an advocacy group, our main priority is to provide advocacy and community with and for disabled students at UVic. The financial and logistical nature of the Funding Requests limited staff availability to host community building activities. With the pause of this program, we aim to provide more frequent community activities and workshops for our students, as our staff will have more capacity to plan and administer community events.

Heather Macartney Memorial Bursary

Total awarded: \$180

Heather Macartney was a 3rd year student who passed away in 1994. At the time the Disabled Students Association raised funds to set up this bursary in Heather's honor.

This endowment bursary is ongoing awarded each year from the interest on the endowment fund. This means that SSD does not directly fund this bursary.

Workshops

Community Care

December 5th, 2023

This workshop hosted 13 student participants in the Student Wellness Centre and on Zoom. A presentation on self and community care was given by Marissa with discussion prompts and a time for sharing experiences. Light refreshments were provided. After the presentation, participants decorated cookies, crafted, and made slime (fun!). All participants went home with a care package, including art supplies, fidgets, meal prep containers, and self-care supplies. Online participants chose one or more items off of a care package menu (up to \$40 in value) to be shipped to their location.

Accessing CAL Accommodations

February 8th, 2024

Originally intended as a collaboration with the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL), the workshop shifted to be more student centred experience, both in-person and on Zoom. This workshop created an opportunity to provide disability justice training to the CAL, which we will hopefully provide next year. This workshop did not require sign-up, and therefore less students attended than we had hoped. We recorded the workshop and hope to post it on our website next year.

Registering for Persons with Disabilities

March 25, 2024

In collaboration with the Victoria Disability Resource Centre (VDRC), the SSD hosted a wildly successful workshop on applying to Persons with Disabilities (PWD) designation. Nearly 25 people attended the online workshop facilitated by the Information and Referral team at the VDRC. This workshop created important community connections with the VDRC and they have offered to come back again to do further workshops on Disability Tax Credit and CPP Disability.

Education

5 Days of Action: Broadening Accessibility

Hannah & Adrean provided a professional development opportunity for the greater UVic community during their annual 5 Days of Action. This workshop focused on simple additions to classrooms to improve accessibility, and also posits that accessibility is larger than just granting CAL accommodations. There was a lot of engagement from the audience, and we are interested in hosting a similar workshop again at next year's 5 Days of Action.

Disability Justice

UVic Co-op and Careers Professional Development

Marissa was invited by Niels Melis-De Lamper, Accessibility and Inclusion Co-op Coordinator, to provide a workshop on disability justice in November 2023. She did a one hour training session on Zoom with over 40 staff members. The workshop was well received by staff and the SSD continues to collaborate with Niels on future offerings for community members.

Office of the Registrar and Enrollment Management (OREM) Professional Development

In December 2023, Marissa, Hannah, and Adrean were invited to attend OREM's retreat for Social Sciences, Sciences, and Humanities academic advisors and records office by the Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL). They did a one hour training session on disability justice to about 50 UVic staff members. This training workshop was well received by OREM staff and the CAL, creating further relationships with UVic staff on how to better support disabled students.

Neurodiversity Training

Marissa and Hannah hosted a professional development seminar for Undergraduate Admissions staff at OREM in February 2024 focussed on disability justice and neurodiversity. This session focussed on how to best support neurodivergent students and unlearning ableist norms of communication. This training session was well received by staff and OREM showed interest in inviting SSD back for future training sessions.

Events

Butchart Gardens and Gelato

June 27th, 2023

In late June, SSD staff and 11 student participants visited the beautiful Butchart Gardens! The SSD provided students entrance tickets, gelato, and a ride on the Rose Carousel. This event was well received and students have requested that it happen again as the weather warms up.

Beacon Hill Petting Zoo Field Trip

July 17th, 2023

In July, SSD staff and 11 student participants adventured to the Beacon Hill Park Children's Farm for a fun afternoon of goat petting and animal observing. The SSD also attended and [livestreamed](#) the end-of-day goat stampede. Students and other organizations from various locations let us know how fun it was to be with us virtually with the goats! After the goat stampede, the SSD took students to get a sweet treat from the Beacon Hill Drive-In and socialize with others. We hope to do a similar event this upcoming summer.

Button Making

2023: August 9th, November 22nd

2024: February 8th, March 22nd, April 12th, April 26th

Our most frequent event series! On various occasions throughout the school year, students gathered together to make buttons out of our templates or designed their own! These buttons were left on the table outside the SSD for students to take and are always in very high demand. We are looking forward to running more button making events in the upcoming year.

Board Game Cafe

September 22nd, 2023

30 student participants ventured to the Interactivity Board Game Cafe in September. This beginning of semester event was very successful! Students enjoyed a variety of boardgames, food, and milkshakes to kick off the 2023-2024 school year.

Hybrid Baking & Games Night

November 9th, 2023

11 student participants joined the SSD in the Student Wellness Centre for an evening of baking and gaming in early November. We made delicious pumpkin cookies (perfect for the season), ate pizza, and played a variety of Jackbox games. Students had lots of positive feedback for us and took all leftover cookies home. We are happy to report that there were no fires, burns, or accidents with using the ovens!

Soupy Play Time

December 14th, 2023

This volunteer led initiative of two students cooked vegan pumpkin soup and distributed it to students studying in the SUB. This fun experiment was incredibly successful - no soup was left unslurped and there were no fires! Students chopped the vegetables at home and brought in their hot plate to cook up the soup in the SSD space.

Hybrid Clay Bake

December 18th, 2023 and April 24th, 2024

Bringing out our artsy sides, the SSD purchased Ditto polymer clay kits from 4Cats studio to make cute creatures and celebrate the end of each semester. Various figures were sculpted by the students who participated, from whales to bunnies, yetis to penguins, deer to sharks, everyone had a very fun time. We hope to do another clay bake event soon!

Plant Repotting Party

April 2nd, 2024

The SSD's plant babies needed larger homes! In collaboration with Campus Community Garden, community members joined us outside the Student Union Building to repot our office plants and give them more space to grow bigger and stronger. The plants are loving their new homes and thriving with more space to spread their roots.

Mindful Rock Painting

April 10th, 2024

As the school year came to a close, the SSD collaborated with the Campus Community garden to paint rocks in the SSD space. Many rocks were painted with various nature themes and spread out around the SSD lounge area.

Advocacy & Outreach

Individual Student Advocacy

Some Success Stories From 2023-24

- Replaced practicum placement for a student with access needs barrier - now thriving in their new placement.
- Successfully supported a student in completing core course requirements in an accessible format that was accepted by the department and professor in Child & Youth Care.
- Supported multiple students in navigating the Centre for Accessible Learning and, in collaboration with the Associate Director, changing their advisor as needed.

SWAG

\$500 grant from 4imprint subsidized the cost of:

- Branded pop-it balls
- Back by popular demand: branded phone wallets!

Almost all of our pop-it balls have been given out to students and we are consistently told how much fun they are to use! We are looking into new branded fidgets for the upcoming "welcome to campus" season.

Outreach

Tabling

Over the past year, we are so grateful to have had an enormous amount of volunteer support. With the help of volunteers, we tabled in and around the SUB for Disability Awareness Day on July 14th, at Fall and Spring Clubs and Course union days, during the art market at SEXPO, and throughout the welcome events in September.

Giveaways at Meetings & Events

At many of our events and workshops, we hosted swag bag giveaways to entice students to participate and see what the SSD has to offer. Draws were made at random using either a

random number generator or random name generator and most prize packs were picked up from our office.

Campaigns

#Access4All

This years #Access4All Campaign work focused on three main areas: building capacity and connections; gathering data; and providing feedback on policy.

Building capacity and connections: During this time the SSD ensured that there were regular campaign meetings to ensure ongoing advocacy work. Also intentional and meaningful efforts were taken to build capacity in student advocates in a way that encourages self-care and acts to battle burn out, a common problem in advocacy spaces. The campaign also made many connections with other universities such as via the founding of the BC Disability Alliance (with UBC, SFU, and Emily Carr), and helping UBC having an Access4All campaign on their campus too. Additionally continued outreach with the campus community occurred, via social media posts and multiple tabling events.

Gathering data: The campaign committee also realised the value of data to support this campaign and advocacy work, so data gathering was prioritised. This included an Instructor's Accessibility Form that gathered 43 responses on both the good and bad experiences of instructors at UVic when it comes to accessibility. Highlights from this included that 36.4% of respondents had issues receiving their CAL accommodations from professors, and one student reported being told "it was "kind of a pain" to accommodate" them.

Providing feedback on policy: Beginning in June 2023, a subcommittee of the Access4All committee began examining the attendance on policies used by UVic and individual professors. This work also involved liaising and meeting with CAL regarding their attendance interpretation. Also the campaign members provided feedback on UVic's Accessibility Plan in order to improve the language used in this document.

Invisible Disabilities

SSD Community Understanding:

"not feeling disabled enough one day and too disabled the other days"

Dynamic disabilities are characterized by fluctuating symptoms of a disability or health condition. This means that folks may have "good days" and "bad days," and each day is different or unpredictable. Since the condition is not consistent, each day needs to be evaluated at face value independent from the day before;

furthermore, symptoms can change throughout the day, requiring an additional layer of flexibility and constantly questioning capacity levels.

Though obstacles may feel constant, one learns how to prepare for anything and becomes a master of anticipating their needs. "I still want to be invited" and I'm "not looking for attention or exaggerating." "Sometimes it's easier to hide my disability than face the invalidation of the medical system and individuals." Masking leads to "wondering if you're disabled enough" (you are).

Like invisible disabilities, there is also great diversity within dynamic disabilities. While some dynamically disabled folks are *visibly disabled* (i.e. someone who uses a mobility aid), others are *invisibly disabled* (i.e. someone with a chronic health condition with no or few outward symptoms); moreover, there are also folks who are both visibly *and* invisibly dynamically disabled. Additionally, dynamically disabled folks may field constant questions and comments such as "you don't look disabled [today]." This is another shared quality between invisible and dynamic disabilities.

Disclaimer: This is a living, working understanding and it is by no means an exhaustive definition.

We welcome additions and constructive feedback.

Dynamic Disabilities

SSD Community Understanding:

"Not feeling disabled enough"

"Spoon management expert" ([spoon theory](#))

Invisible disabilities are often chronic, can be painful, and can be mental health disorders. Folks with invisible disabilities may have less spoons. There is a paradoxical sense of being too disabled to connect to folks, and similarly not being disabled enough to access services. This leads to social isolation, internalized guilt, shame, systemic invalidation, and being misunderstood by peers.

Another aspect to invisible disabilities is masking - both the wearing of face masks, and also the neurodivergent tendency to not portray emotions, reactions, or behaviours that are perceived to be against social norms. Masking can also extend beyond neurodivergence to encompass those with chronic illnesses

masking their symptoms. Executive dysfunction was also identified as a facet of invisible disabilities.

Within invisible disabilities there is also great diversity, personal and community identities, and a deep compassion for others' lived experiences. The disabled community acknowledges and validates each others' experiences, and we also identified that creativity is a benchmark.

Finally, invisible disabilities may come with access to funding in certain situations, and with certain diagnoses.

Disclaimer: This is a living, working understanding and it is by no means an exhaustive definition.

We welcome additions and constructive feedback.

Community Relationships

University of Victoria's Student Society (UVSS)

Ice Cream Fundae

July 21st, 2023

In collaboration with the UVSS Events team, the SSD ran an "Ice Cream Fundae" event outside of the Student Union Building. Hundreds of students, staff, and community members filtered through to have yummy ice cream in the summer heat.

Pride Collective

Community care circles

- Neurodiverse & queer (March 2024)

Six (6) neurodiverse and queer students attended a community care circle led by Hannah Brown and Kai Punt. While doing crafts, having snacks, and playing with fidgets the group discussed their lived experiences of this intersectionality.

Campus Community Garden (CCG)

Accessible bed reseeding

October 20th, 2023

Acorn's Notes:

- Planted collard greens and garlic with garden coordinator
- Discussed accessibility in outdoor activities and brainstormed possible alternative actually accessible garden bed designs
 - Acorn is now on the CCG accessible bed planning committee
- Also learnt about and started winterizing hops

Visited the Campus Community Garden & weeded and prepped the accessible garden bed for overwintering. We planted some hardy seeds and the Garden Coordinator added some beneficial minerals to the soil. We brought snacks and drinks along to share, and overall had a wonderful time.

Bi-weekly Garden Parties

Starting March 28th, 2024

Starting at the end of the spring term, the SSD ventured over to the Campus Community Garden every other Thursday afternoon to work with their team on accessible garden projects. We are excited to continue this collaboration throughout the summer of 2024!

Gender Empowerment Centre (GEM)

SEXPO 2024

1. Kink & Disability Panel on Feb 16th

This was a panel of 3 disabled people from the local kink community moderated by Hannah Brown. After a structured discussion the floor was opened for questions from the audience.

2. Sex & Accessibility Workshop on Feb 15th

(passing to Grace and Hannah for numbers and content, etc.)

Plenty Collective - Local Organization

Write-In

January 25th, 2024

All UVSS advocacy and affiliate groups collaborated with the SSD and Plenty Collective, a local mutual aid group, to host a write-in event in the SUB. Participants were encouraged to write to their elected officials on topics that inspired them and/or current world happenings. The SSD took care of all the mailing of the letters. About 25 students filtered in and out of the two spaces for this event, which also birthed our accessibility plan template for future events.

Tara Rae Moss; Author

Recorded short videos to post on social media for dynamic disabilities campaign
A dynamically disabled artist and acclaimed author shared with us her lived experience navigating life with her disability via monologue.

University Relationships

University of British Columbia (UBC), Simon Fraser University (SFU) & Emily Carr

Post-Secondary Disability Alliance (PSDA) Discord

Weekly meetings with Simon Fraser University's Disability & Neurodiversity Alliance (DNA)

National Educational Association for Disabled Students (NEADS)

Adrean and Hannah's field trip to State of the Schools at UBC!

Adrean and Hannah traveled to Vancouver to attend the NEADS State of the Schools Tour Vancouver Stop, with SFU and UBC. This was a great event with multiple talks, panels, and discussion opportunities SSD attending allowed us to network and connect with other disability organisations in attendance.

University of Victoria Collaborations

UVic's Accessibility Committee Representatives

Julia and Acorn? Hannah for GSS

Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL)

We are pleased to report that the SSD and the CAL have rebuilt relations over the past year and have collaborated to deliver professional development to UVic staff. We hope to deliver disability justice training to all CAL staff sometime in the next year to ensure all advisors and staff members have the same baseline of disability justice knowledge.

Learning Assistance Program (LAP)

Study Skills hosted by Hannah Brown

In their role as a learning strategist at CAL Hannah hosted regular twice a week 2 hour hybrid Study Skills sessions. These free sessions allow any students to meet with Hannah to develop

their own personalized strategies and study skills to achieve academic success based on their unique goals.

Equity & Human Rights (EQHR)

EQHR reached out to the SSD in Fall 2023 about their Discrimination and Harassment Policy (GV0205) review and re-vamp. They requested input on the policy from the SSD staff, council, and community members. The SSD held two conversation cafes regarding GV0205 this past year.

October 25th, 2023

A small number of students provided feedback on the old GV0205 policy and informed the SSD what they would like to see in a new policy. The SSD communicated this to EQHR, and they informed us that they would be re-writing the entire policy and would like more input in the coming months.

January 24th, 2024

EQHR and SSD hosted a second conversation cafe that approximately 10 students attended. EQHR presented a new draft policy based on earlier feedback. Students gave input on a new draft policy and what they would like to see in the new policy, as well as discussed their experiences with the current policy. All students that participated were awarded \$20 in ONECard funds.

By The Numbers

The SSD provides services and advocacy to any undergraduate or graduate student that self-identifies as having one or more disabilities. We also welcome community members to use our lounge and respite rooms.

Demographics

The majority of our community members are undergraduate students, with a significant portion of those students being part time students. UVic defines “full time” for undergraduate students as taking 6 or more credits per term (4 or more courses). It is important to note that students registered with the Centre for Accessible Learning are eligible for being considered “full time” while only taking a 40% course load (2 courses) for funding and tax purposes. Verification of enrollments provided to the SSD for specific programs may not properly reflect if they are designated part time for student fees, however are actually full time as per their accommodations. Students may also self-report being full time students, as per their accommodations, however pay part time fees due to their number of credit hours per term.

Our council that was elected on February 29, 2024 consists of 12 students - two graduate students and 10 undergraduate students. Three council members are international students. We collected demographic data for our Food Security program starting in September 2023. The demographics for applicants of the program is as follows:

Fall 2023:

- Undergraduate: 80%; graduate: 20%
- Full time: 85%; part time: 15%
- Domestic: 83%; international: 14%, prefer not to say: 3%

Spring 2024:

- Undergraduate: 82%; graduate 18%
- Full time: 88%, part time: 12%
- Domestic: 86%; international: 12%; prefer not to say: 2%

Social Media

Instagram

Instagram is our main form of social media engagement at the SSD. This year, we had a goal of reaching 1,000 followers and are now over 1,100 followers as of the end of the fiscal year. We are planning on doing a giveaway on our Instagram account to celebrate this milestone in the summer of 2024. Our post reach continues to increase through both paid advertisements and non-paid posts. We received the most number of likes on a single post in our Instagram history this year, with 110 likes on our post about our Persons with Disabilities workshop. This workshop was also our most successful this year, likely due to high social media engagement.

TikTok

This past year, we started our TikTok account. We currently have not posted to the account since August 2023, however we hope to revive the account in the coming year to further our engagement strategy. Our most popular video received over 900 views in the summer of 2023!

Facebook

Most of our Instagram posts also get cross-posted to our Facebook page through the Meta Business Suite. Our Facebook page does not get a lot of normal engagement from students, however other groups often share posts from our page. As young people and students decreasingly use Facebook and prefer other platforms such as Instagram, we expect this page to continue to have low engagement.

Year-to-Year

SSD program use and engagement has increased over the past year. In our December 2023 SAGM, by-elections were held to fill vacant council positions. At that meeting, all remaining council positions were elected, leaving us with a full council of 15 students. As of the February 2024 AGM, we have four open General Member positions. We saw a 50% increase in attendance between our 2023 AGM and our 2024 AGM.

Our program usage has also gone up both between and throughout the years. Between Spring 2022 and Spring 2024 we have seen over a 400% increase in applicants in the Food Security program. In the last fiscal year, we used 80%, 67%, and 97% of our summer, fall, and spring term budgets respectively on our Food Security program. In fall 2023, we increased the budget of the program, therefore despite the percentage of total budget used being lower in the fall, applications actually increased by 13%. We saw a large jump in applications between fall 2023 and spring 2024 marked by a 42% increase.

Challenges

The SSD continues to face three main challenges in our organization: consistent attendance at events, workstudy hours, and financials. While the SSD saw increased engagement in our programs usage and many events, we still struggled with some events having very low attendance. We found that low engagement happened when there were no paid advertisements for the event and/or there was no registration requirement, meaning potential participants did not get email reminders for the event. To mitigate this, we plan to do more online advertising on Instagram and Facebook, as well as using registration forms for all events in which it makes sense. We also plan to do more tabling in and around the SUB on a more regular basis to promote events and workshops.

As noted in our Workstudy section, UVic has given the SSD less hours for workstudy staff this year, limiting our capacity to do more outreach and events. We have asked UVic for more hours in the 2024-2025 year and hope that we are granted those hours to ensure that we have the capacity to create events and programming for our community. The SSD is also continuing to budget in a deficit which is not sustainable for the long term. As our trust fund starts to run out, we are actively looking towards more financially viable ways forward, such as applying for grants for programs, collaborating with campus partners, and exploring new ways of relationship building. Due to our financial situation, the SSD has had to pause major programming until a viable solution to our financials is found.

Looking Forward to 2024-25

The SSD is planning to do more low-cost events and community activities over the next year while we take a break from our high-cost programming. This includes field trips to the Bug Zoo and Beacon Hill Petting Farm, bi-weekly crafting events, monthly workshops, peer support groups, and community events every few months. We plan on hosting our second annual Mental Health Resource Fair in September, as well as working with the Director of Campaigns and Community Relations on re-launching the #Access4All campaign. Aside from campaigns and events, we plan to add accessibility statements for most rooms in the SUB on our website, as well as restart our collaborations with the Advocacy for Inclusive Recreation program to make fitness more accessible, safe, and body neutral to students. We are planning on running two referendum questions in 2025 and 2026; the former with the Graduate Student Society, the latter with UVSS. Seeking increased support in funding acknowledges that disability impacts all groups, and that the community needs for disabled students are high. Throughout all of this, we aim to continue to support our community through direct advocacy for students and creating a community of support, inclusion, and access.

Conclusion

The SSD has had an incredibly busy year! From new coordinators to new and returning council members, there have been many fresh faces around the space, as well as many continuously active community members. Our largest change this year was the pause to our programming. While we know how deeply impactful financial support can be to students, we unfortunately no longer have the resources to provide our large-scale programming at the level that it was previously run. We hope to eventually return to programming in some form in the future after exploring more financially sustainable options.

Our engagement in our elected council, events, and workshops has increased over the past year. While we are very grateful to see more students participating in SSD activities, we would like to further our engagement next year through more advertisements, outreach, and registration forms. We also acknowledge that disabilities can be dynamic and that our engagement fluctuations from event to event sometimes cannot be predicted due to our participants being disabled students. Flare-ups, stressors, and capacity levels can be incredibly dynamic, and we want to continue to hold space for students to engage with the SSD in low-spoons ways, whether it be sharing more about our events on social media or just dropping into the SSD space for a conversation. We are so incredibly grateful for the community that we have here at the SSD and look forward to seeing what we can create together in the years to come.