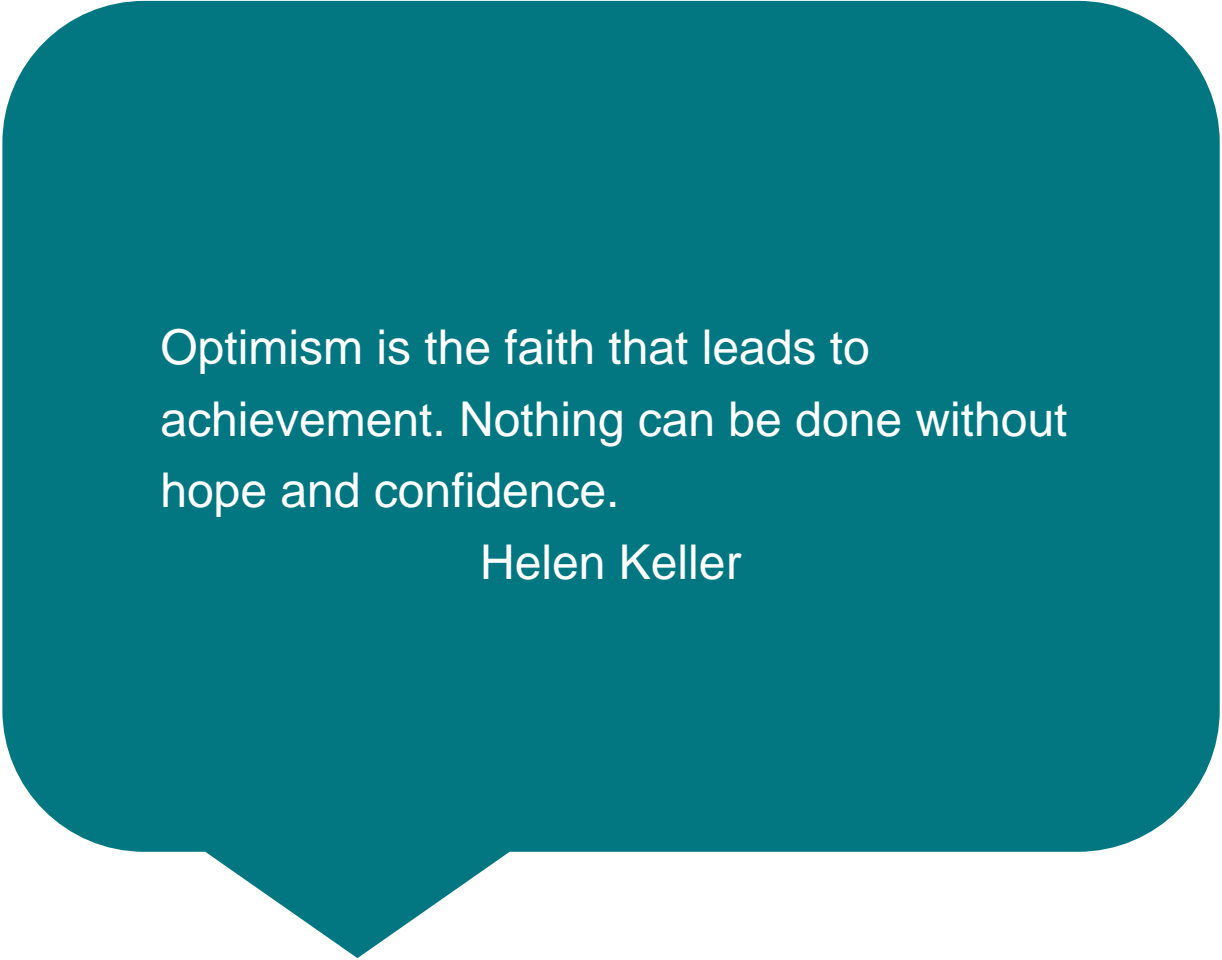


Annual Report 2022-2023



e m p  w e r
the disability
resource centre

A large, teal-colored speech bubble with rounded corners and a small tail pointing downwards, serving as a background for the text.

Optimism is the faith that leads to
achievement. Nothing can be done without
hope and confidence.

Helen Keller

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Empower Overview

- Transition from the Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC) to Empower, the Disability Resource Centre on April 1, 2016
- Transition from Civic #4 to The Independent Living Resource Centre (ILRC) in 1997-1998
- Accredited member of IL Canada
- Not-for-profit cross disability organization
- 16 full-time staff and 35-40 project staff throughout the year

Mission Statement

Empower is a consumer-controlled, non-profit organization that provides leadership in the delivery of cross-disability services and supports while promoting a more inclusive society within Newfoundland and Labrador.

Independent Living

“Independence is not measured by the quality of tasks we can perform without support, but by the quality of life we can have with support.”

Independent Living is:

- Having a choice
- Making decisions
- Taking risks
- Taking responsibility
- Having control of one’s own life

At Empower, the Disability Resource Centre, we break barriers every day. Barriers to access. To knowledge. To choices. Anyone with a disability can use our services. And anyone can help, through volunteering, donations, or even a career with Empower. Empower is a vital part of our community, and the need for our services is growing. With your support, you will be helping even more people find their path to independent living.

Chairperson's Report

The Empower Team under the leadership and direction of Kathy Hawkins, Executive Director, continue to advance ways and means to support our over 400 members and many consumers who access the variety of services offered through Empower. "Thank you to Kathy and the outstanding staff Team. Your dedication, commitment and support has been second to none – we could not do what we do without each of you."

You will read how the Services provided to our members have continued to grow. Staff reached out to members to get a better understanding of those we were serving. 196 people provided information. 94.9% of respondents said they self-identify as having a disability. The majority of those were people between the age of 40 – 59 followed closely by those 18 – 39. This is important information to ensure Empower is meeting the needs of its members.

As well a "Service Satisfaction Survey" was made available to all who have accessed Empower for support. The results will assist in providing information for improving and growing services (or keeping things status quo).

Building renovations have been quite extensive. Three completely new accessible washrooms, new flooring throughout, heaters, lights, electrical, windows, doors, painting, and much more. If you haven't been to Empower recently then you should try to visit the building to see first-hand the tremendous amount of work that has been completed. Thank you again to the Staff for accommodating these renovations and changes!

Empower was pleased to welcome Ambassador David Cohen from the United States Consulate. He was interested in learning about our

Programs and Services and how accessibility and inclusion are cornerstones of our work. Our Executive Director continues to communicate with his office.

The detailed information provided in the Report by members of the Empower Team highlights the work completed in 2022-2023. Nutritional Support Program, Youth Ventures, Member Services, Technology Services, Advocacy Services, Career Services and InclusionNL reach members, consumers, employers and the community, supporting sustainable futures, disability confidence, housing, health care, mental health and social skills. While the Nutritional Support Program was completed in November, it is important to note over 240 people received supports through this work.

We were pleased to receive confirmation from the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador of continued operational funding. In addition, the Community Inclusion Services and Career Services Programs had been confirmed for funding. We are deeply appreciative to our government and our funding partners for this financial support. Without this funding, our Programs and Services could not be maintained.

The Board continues to address ways and means to fund necessary building repairs and maintenance from our very fixed budget. A special thank you to Melanie Grandy, Finance Officer, for always having the answers to our broad range of finance questions.

Again in 2022, Empower completed its annual celebration recognizing the International Day for Persons with Disabilities. On December 3, our 2022 Independent Living Awards were presented at Government House. The recipients were as follows:

- Cecilia Carroll Award for Independent Living – **Vera Parsons**
- Business Award for Independent Living – **Royal Bank of Canada**
- Young Leader Award – **Hilary Hennessey**
- Social Inclusion Award – **Matt Debicki – Able Sail**

The Board will continue to seek ways and means to address issues raised by our members and others who use Empower Services while exploring new and innovative ways to support Empower programs and services.

In closing, I extend once again my sincerest thanks to the Empower team, to the dedicated and committed Board Members and all our volunteers who make progress success! I wish to recognize the service of Heidi Edgar, Deborah Gilbert and Kristine Strickland, who are leaving the Board this year. As your Board Chair, I am extremely grateful for your commitment and dedication.



Respectfully,
Carole J Barron
Chairperson

Executive Director's Report

This fiscal year was a year of modifying and adapting our Centre through the numerous renovations we have completed and our service delivery by fine tuning new services and revising current ones.

We were very pleased to be able to offer in-person services and host small group meetings and tours at Empower once again and continue our collaborations with recreation programs offered throughout the community. Staff continue to work diligently offering services to members, as you'll read about in this Annual Report.

What a great experience it was to come together for our Annual IL Award Ceremony at Government House in recognition of International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3, 2022. All the award recipients, as highlighted in our Chairperson's report, work tirelessly to advance accessibility and independence in our community and we were very pleased to provide this recognition to them. We also recognized the day and celebrated the holidays by hosting our Christmas Dinner & Dance on that same evening. Everyone had an excellent evening with sincere thanks to our caterers for the fantastic meal they provided.

Throughout this past year our team came together to review our services, discuss strategies of moving forward, identify gaps in community that people with disabilities are experiencing and share insights on solutions. During these times we have developed a Members Satisfaction Survey that is distributed on a weekly basis and have been completing the background work needed to add a series to our website entitled Empowering You. Our Dinner Club has been very active attending dinners at various restaurants in the city. I would like to personally thank our volunteer Amanda Howlett for her coordination of Dinner Club and am looking

forward to new venues to come.

Our members have participated in many types of activities throughout the City, many of them hosted by the City of St. John's, while our Coordinator of Member Services, Amanda Lush, has organized many as well. Group Sessions at the Clay Café during Christmas time and again recognizing National AccessAbility Awareness Week were a huge hit amongst our members. Member volunteers are involved in our Garden by being on the Garden Committee as well as organizing the fruits of our harvest by sharing Butternut Squash soup with all those involved. We thoroughly enjoy creating our Empower family.

Our Board of Directors have been very busy throughout this past year, and we are extremely fortunate to have such a strong Board who understands the work we do and the Independent Living philosophies that govern our work. They have been extremely supportive of all our transitions, overseeing building renovations and continuing their work on developing policies and practices that guide us. Thank you to each of our Board of Directors and especially our Chairperson, Carole Barron. I would also like to personally thank Heidi Edgar, Deborah Gilbert, and Kristine Strickland for your leadership and direction on our Committees and for your many years of commitment on our Board. We were sorry to see Kristine move out of the province and want to recognize that both Heidi and Deborah are completing their six-year term with us. We wish you all the very best in your next endeavors.

In closing, I'd like to send a sincere thank you to our staff. Throughout my year as Interim Executive Director, we have made significant growth in our services and membership, an expansion in our services across the province, and have worked closely with community organizations, business partners, and government, all of which would not come to fruition without

their longstanding commitment and dedication.

Respectfully Submitted,

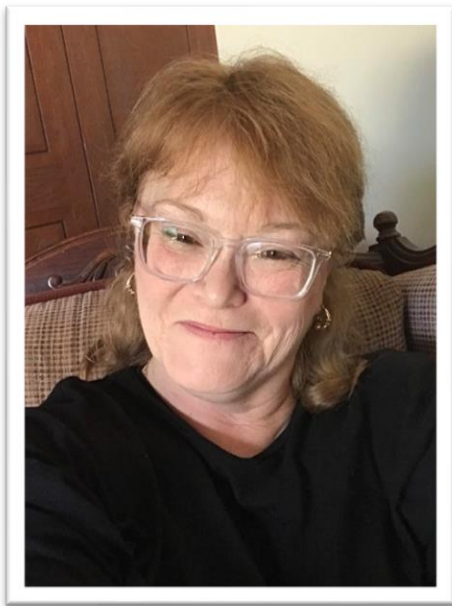
A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "K. Hawkins". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "K" and a trailing flourish.

Kathy J. Hawkins
Interim Executive Director

IAAP

International Association
of Accessibility Professionals

MEMBER



Treasurer's Report

On behalf of Kristine Strickland, Board Treasurer, I am delighted to provide the Treasurer's Report to the membership of Empower, The Disability Resource Centre.

I am pleased to advise that the financial statements for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2023, have been audited without issue by Beacon Accounting Professional Corporation. Per those audited financial statements, the total revenue received by Empower was \$1,253,692 and the total expenditures for the year were \$1,357,014. Further renovations to the Empower building were carried out this fiscal year, totalling \$105,563, which was taken from the Reserve Fund (rather than the Operational Budget). The net result for the fiscal year operations was a surplus of \$20,918.

I would like to extend our gratitude and appreciation to the various provincial government departments that provide ongoing financial support of Empower. As well, a heartfelt thank you to all our financial patrons and funders. Your generous contributions to Empower enable us to provide the services that support people with disabilities in achieving their independence and to promote the philosophy of Independent Living.

Finally, I would also like to thank the staff and volunteers at Empower. Your commitment and dedication to Empower and its work allow us to continue to provide the vitally important services that make our communities accessible and inclusive.

Kathy Hawkins, Executive Director

On behalf of Kristine Strickland, Board Treasurer

IL Canada NL Provincial Representative Report

Founded in 1986 by the Independent Living Movement Membership, Independent Living Canada (formerly: Canadian Association of Independent Living Centres) represents the network of IL Member Centres at the national level. IL Canada performs several functions on behalf of Member Centres including: providing a collective voice on national issues; fostering and maintaining partnerships; building the capacity and scale of IL in Canada; and preserving the integrity and importance of IL in Canada on the national stage.

Managed entirely by a volunteer Board of Directors comprised of Provincial Representatives from across Canada, the IL Canada Board of Directors has continued to reinforce our commitment to people with disabilities and our 24-member-IL Centres across Canada. For IL Canada, the Centres, and our consumers, it has been a year of change and transition.

IL Canada Governance & Staffing

Last year I was nominated as the NL Provincial Rep for Empower, The Disability Resource Centre on the IL Canada Board of Directors. For 2022-2023, Tom Pugliese became Chairperson of the Board. Jennifer Marchand as 1st Vice Chairperson, Cathy LaFrance as 2nd Vice Chairperson. Sue Larocque Treasurer, Jimmy Tessier Royer Secretary, Myself as NL Provincial Rep, Jen Powley NS Rep, Sebastian Duguay-Nardini NB Rep, Robin East SK Rep, Teresa Bullegas Member At Large AB, Diane Krueger AB Rep. A number of committees have been recreated including an HR Committee and an Accreditation Committee.

Towards the end of this fiscal year, Anne McRae, National Executive Director of IL Canada announced her intent to retire. Anne remained on for

an extra year from her original date of retirement. IL Canada's HR Committee are in the process of actively recruiting for a new NED. Through this past year we had two individuals in the position of Executive Assistant that resulted in very short terms because of new opportunities or personal circumstances.

Proposals and Funding

IL Canada was successful in receiving approval on their grant submission to Social Development Partnership for three years of funding. This agreement provides core funding to IL Canada and member centres to help fund IL programs for our consumers. IL Canada has also received funding through Accessibility Standards Canada to conduct research of festivals and events across the country and offer recommendations for standards development to ASC. Four Sites have been selected for this work with Empower being one of those sites. A national research coordinator has been hired for this initiative and work began in June 2023.

Accreditation

Throughout this past year the Board developed an Accreditation Committee to review this process. They made revisions and updates to the process and have a goal of streamlining the work for member centres so it's not such an arduous task to complete. The Accreditation Committee has reported that their work continues and are pleased with review progress made to date.

IL Canada Website

Throughout the course of this past year we have had a number of challenges with our website and complete virtual presences being offline

for extended periods of time. We have since made changes to our internet provider services and everything is running smoothly once again.

Other Work

Throughout this past year we had a number of successful initiatives. Our work in partnership with Muscular Dystrophy Canada on the Disability Inclusion Action Plan has come to a close and we have presented our final report with recommendations to the Government of Canada.

We also completed national research on Attendant Care Services with many people with disabilities coming together to share experiences regarding home supports and attendant care. Final recommendations on the gaps and variances in services across the country have been presented to the Government of Canada.

The IL Canada AGM will be in Sept 23 & 24th in Toronto, ON. A virtual registration is available if anyone is interested in joining through Zoom. A link will be provided to all those who have registered.

I'm looking forward to the upcoming work of IL Canada throughout this year. The Festivals Project will see many connections made and networks developed as we continue to grow our organization.

Respectfully Submitted,
Kathy Hawkins
Newfoundland Provincial Representative



Empower Annual Services

Empower provides a variety of services to both individuals and groups in an effort to promote inclusion for persons with disabilities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.

Empower services fall under one of the following five categories and a brief overview of each of the five service categories is provided below.

- Consultation
- Information
- Individual Support
- Skill Development
- Referral

A Consultation is a service that involves in-depth work with an individual around a particular topic. For example, the Coordinator of Technology Services provides a consultation service when meeting with a student who requires technology support for educational purposes. The Coordinator will work with the student to identify challenges and try out Adaptive Technology options so the student can decide what works best.

They will discuss options around purchasing the technology followed by offering support to teach the student how best to use the technology once it is acquired.

An Information Service is simply providing information on a disability related topic. Examples would include individuals approaching Empower to obtain information on services available through a government program to assist with renovations to a home or accessing funding to assist with the cost of required medical equipment or services.

Individual Support moves beyond the providing of information and involves staff providing direct assistance to an individual or family in addressing a

particular issue. This service could include something as basic as providing alternate formats for a consumer who requires printed material in Braille. However, most of the individual supports provided by staff, involve working with members on difficult issues over extended periods of time.

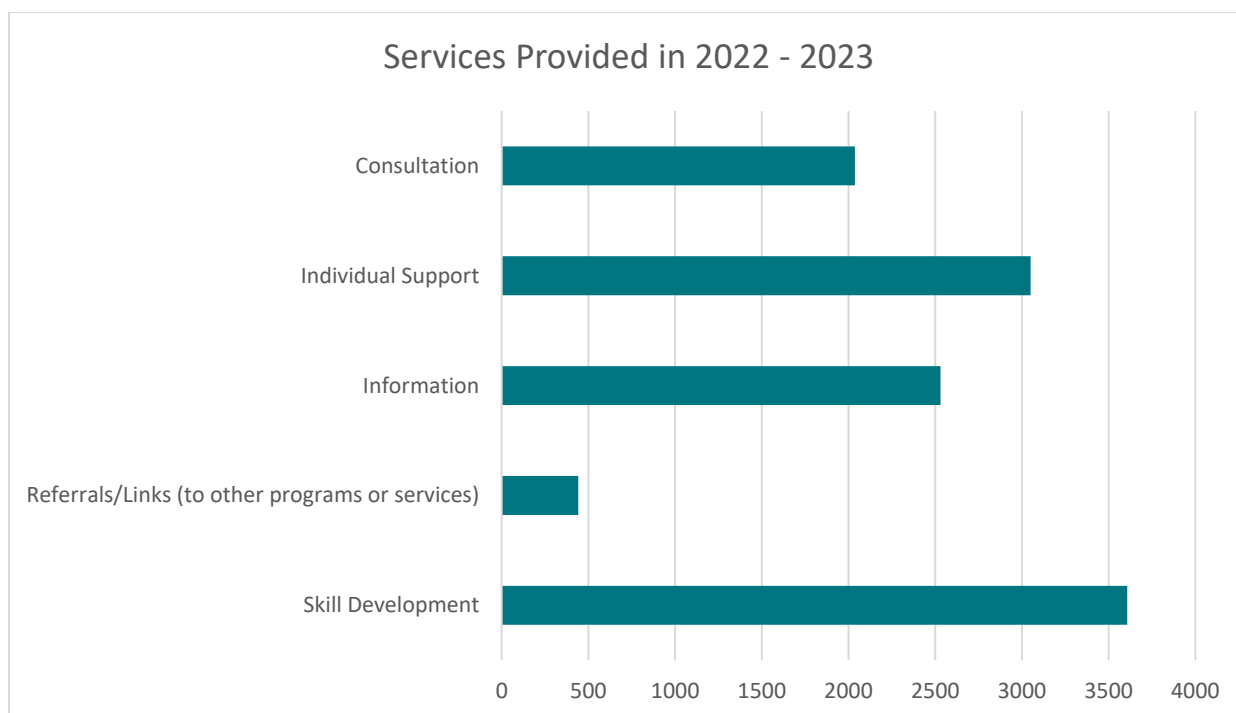
Skill Development services occur when staff provide training and instruction to an individual. For example, the Manager of Advocacy Services provides a skill development service when helping a person complete a Canada Pension Plan application form. Or our Coordinator of Member Services provides a skill development service when working with a volunteer interested in learning what is involved with volunteering at Empower.

Referral Services occur when an individual is connected to another program, service or organization. As an example, the Career Services Coordinator provides a referral service when linking a consumer who's interested in participating in a Linkages employment opportunity with Easter Seals. They would also provide a referral service when connecting jobseekers with staff at the Department of Children, Seniors and Social Development to apply for "job start" funds.

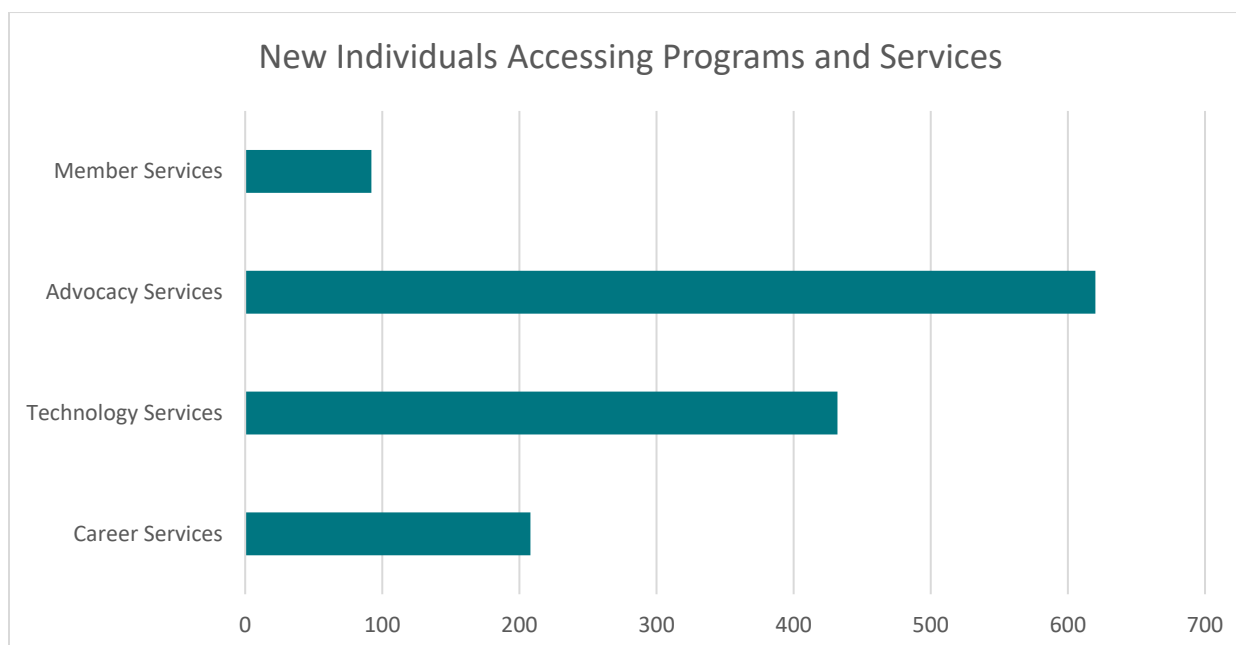
Empower programs and services primarily cover the St. John's Metro and Northeast Avalon area. However, with the addition of our two provincial programs Building Community Inclusion NL (formerly Adaptive Technology Internship and IL Internship) and InclusionNL, many services are provided to other areas of the province.

The charts below provide a breakdown of the areas where service is provided and the types of individuals/groups accessing Empower services.

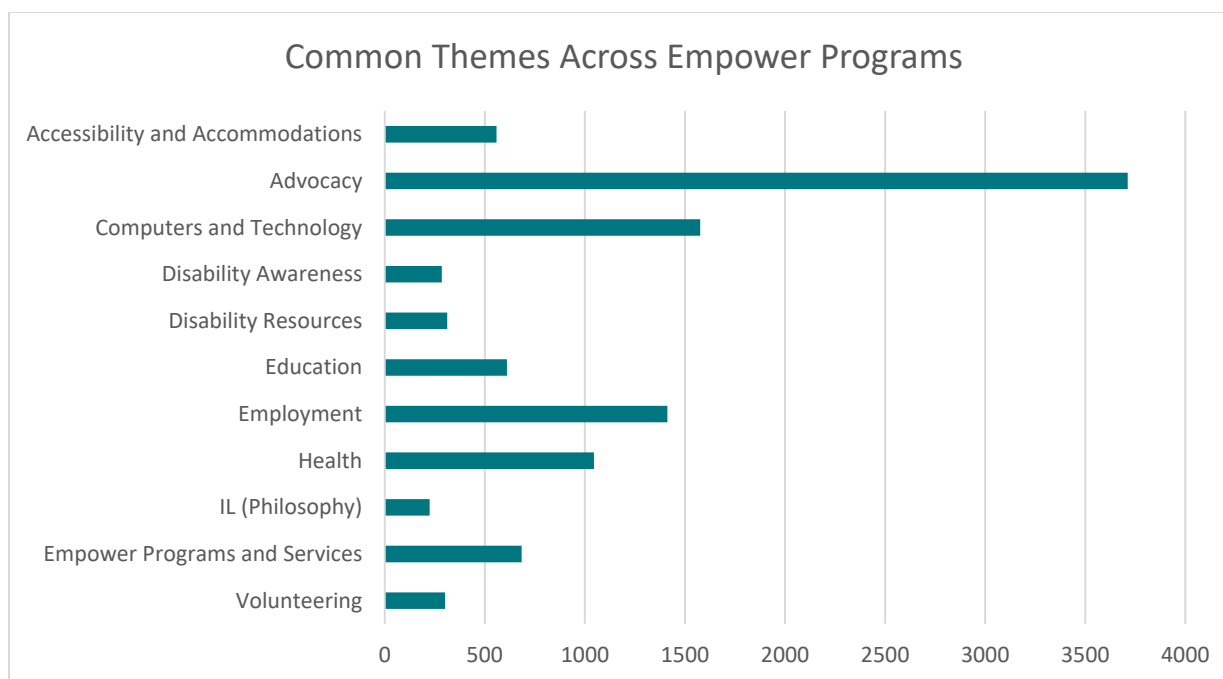




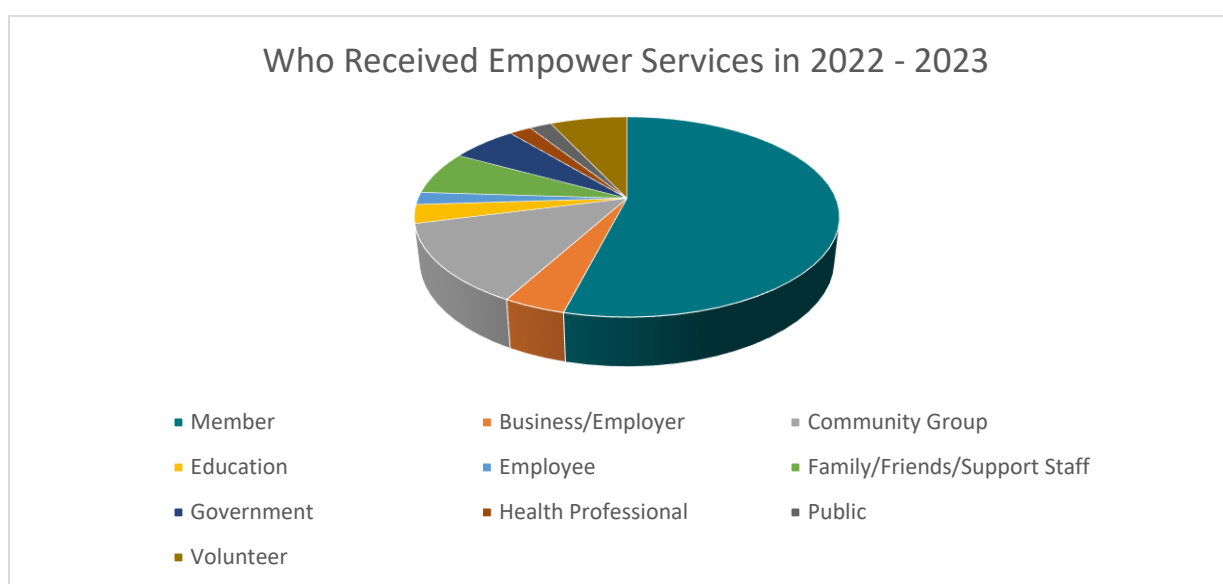
This bar chart shows the numbers of people provided with services by Empower in 2022 – 2023, in the categories of Consultation (2037), Individual Support (3050), Information (2531), Referrals/Links to other programs or services (442) and Skill Development (3607).



This bar chart shows the number of new individuals accessing programs and services at Empower in 2022 – 2023, in the categories of Member Services (92), Advocacy Services (620), Technology Services (432) and Career Services (208).

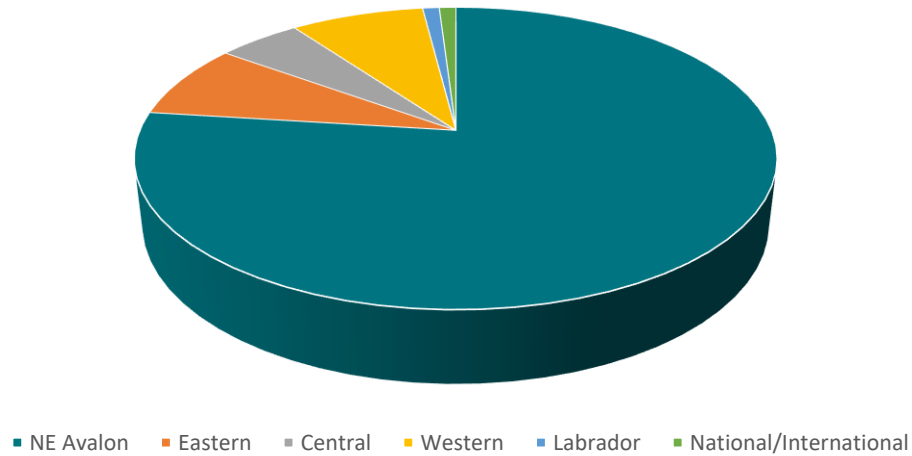


This bar chart shows the common themes across all Empower programs and services. The themes are accessibility and accommodations (558), advocacy (3712), computers and technology (1576), disability awareness (285), disability resources (312), education (610), employment (1412), health (1045), IL philosophy (224), Empower programs (684) and services and volunteering (301).



This pie chart shows who received services from Empower in 2022 – 2023. The categories are member (54%), business/employer (4%), community group (13%), education (3%), employee (2%), family/friends/support staff (7%), government (6%), health professional (2%), public (2%) and volunteers (7%).

Geographical Distribution of Empower Services 2022 - 2023



This pie chart shows the geographical distribution of Empower services in 2022 – 2023, in the NE Avalon (77%), Eastern (8%), Central (5%), Western (8%), Labrador (1%) and National/International regions (1%).



Advocacy Services Report

It has been a very successful year for Advocacy Services as we continue to support large numbers of individuals that identify as having a disability. The number of referrals from other community organizations and government agencies has increased dramatically due to the increased awareness of barriers that people with disabilities experience in navigating complex and oppressive systems.

Empower's Advocacy Services Program is one of the only programs in Newfoundland and Labrador that supports people with cross-disabilities. Advocacy Services provide support to members to identify goals, personal strengths, and skills by providing clear and accurate information about current legislation, policy regulations, and resources.

Individuals have availed of Advocacy Services to empower themselves and improve their abilities to navigate complex systems in order to make informed decisions. Advocacy Services supports people in breaking down barriers through individual advocacy when requested. Advocacy Services will often act as a support or liaison between the individual and government agency, as well as other service delivery providers, when requested by an individual.

Through the transfer of knowledge, Advocacy Services teaches and empowers people that self-identify with a disability how to become effective self-advocates. Advocacy Services ensure that the voices of the people we support with disabilities are heard in every service they seek.

The Advocacy Services program operates from the point of view that there is "Nothing about us without us." It is a practice that we are passionate about keeping at the front and center of everything we do when supporting individuals.

Advocacy Services operate from a coordinated access approach, collaborating with all community stakeholders, which we have found key to assisting the people we support in obtaining basic needs and goals. Advocacy Services prides itself in effectively working with an extensive network of community and governmental partners which contributes to the success of Empower's representation in the community. We are thankful for the support and guidance from our strong network of key stakeholders that support Advocacy Services at Empower.

Advocacy Services has seen a major increase in the need for navigational and advocacy support in accessing services over the last number of years. Reference Figure 1 for statistics on the increase in the request for service.

Figure 1. Total Number of Contacts for Advocacy Services

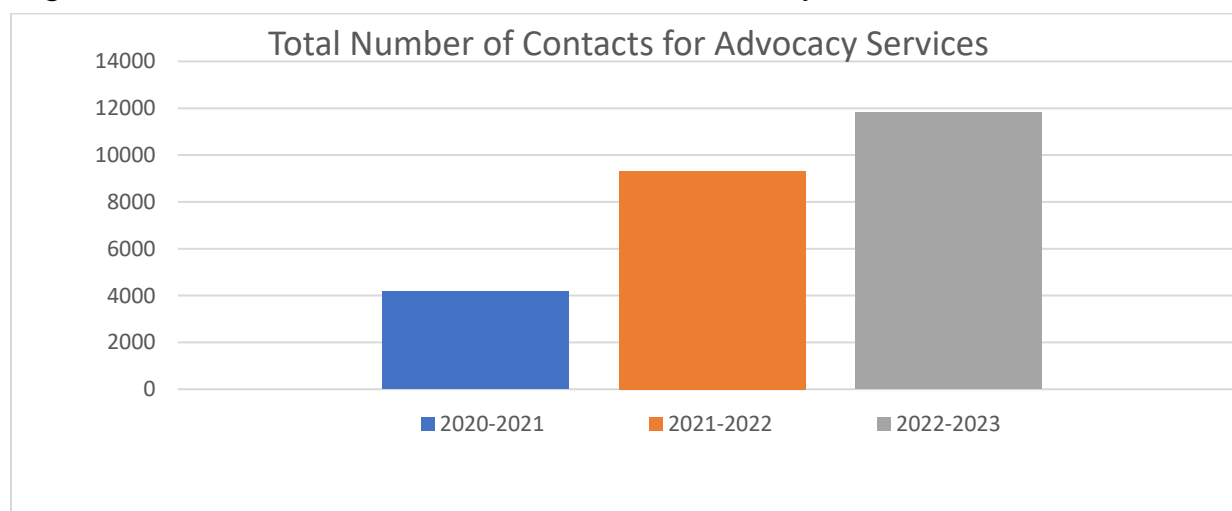


Figure 1 description of data: The graph above depicts the total number of contacts for Advocacy Services for the past three years. In the year 2020-2021 there were 4,176 contacts, in 2021-2022 there were 9,312 contacts, and in 2022-2023 there were 11,826 contacts total.



Figure 2. Top four reasons for accessing Advocacy Services

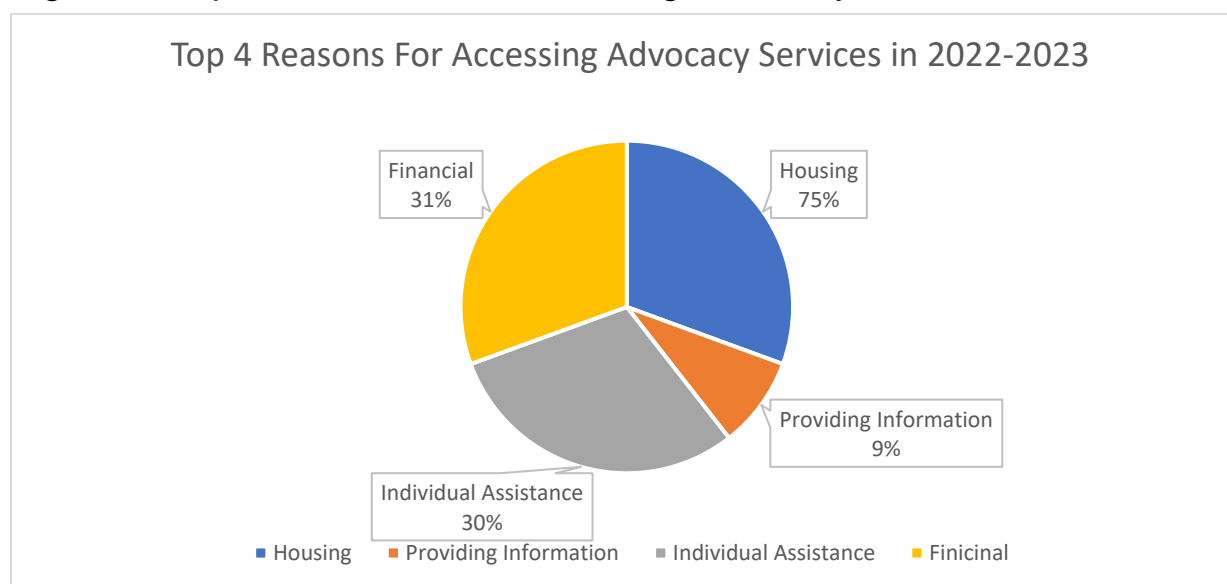


Figure 2 depicts the top four reasons for accessing Advocacy Services in 2022-2023 which include: Housing (75%), Financial (31%), Individual Assistance (30%) and Providing Information (9%).

More often, members are faced with barriers to accessing these four areas of support than other issues addressed in Advocacy Services. The lived experiences of our members highlight the current crisis surrounding home support services in our province. The prevalence of poverty can be seen through the financial concerns of our members. The rise in housing concerns demonstrates the importance and value of our Housing Accommodation Coordinator position and the current housing crisis people face.

Key Accomplishments

- Empower held its third virtual tax clinic in partnership with the Canada Revenue Agency's Community Tax Volunteer Program. Over 50 members had their taxes e-filed through the clinic.

- Advocacy Services continued to support members with GoBus eligibility assessments to receive permanent status.
- Advocacy Services has received numerous referrals including from other Empower programs, community organizations, government departments, and agencies.
- Advocacy Services has supported several seniors with disabilities through individual advocacy and interagency teams with our community partners supporting issues of poverty, mental health, housing, and home support.
- Services expanded with the hiring of an Advocacy Support Assistant to help meet service and members needs.
- The Advocacy Services program continues the valued partnership with Memorial University of Newfoundland and Labrador (MUN) and the School of Social Work. Advocacy Services at Empower has provided mentorship for Bachelor of Social Work Students (first and second degree) in the Fall 2022, Winter 2023, and Spring 2023 semesters. Over the past number of years, we have established a partnership with the Faculty of Nursing at MUN, as well as the Center

“Advocacy Services has taught me to stand up for myself and ask why, speak up, and learn to be a leader. I’ve also learned to be independent and be responsible for myself and take a chance.”

- Member of Empower-2023

of Nursing Studies, in mentoring students. All students that complete placements with Advocacy Services at Empower receive an enriched learning experience from a cross-disability lens.

Participation in External Events:

- Sit at Coordinated Access to Homes through End Homelessness weekly.
- Attended numerous Disability Network Meetings.
- Joby Fleming is the Co-Chair of the City of St. John's Inclusion Advisory Committee.
- Joby Fleming sits on Community Advisory Board (CAB) with End Homelessness St. John's since October 2021.
- Member of the Para Transit Working Group

Housing Accommodations Coordinator Overview:

In collaboration with End Homelessness St. John's, Empower's Housing Accommodations Coordinator works within Advocacy Services to assist people who are experiencing homelessness. The Housing Accommodations Coordinator collaborates with community and government agencies to help these individuals obtain and maintain safe, affordable, and accessible housing. The Housing Accommodations Coordinator assists people by supporting them with case management, crisis interventions, housing searches, apartment viewings, and initial housing set-up. Additionally, they collaborate with landlords and help members navigate the Residential Tenancies Act.



The Housing Accommodation Coordinator's total number of contacts for January 2023- June 2023 is 1,230 interactions between other organizations and individuals receiving support.

“Working with Empower, particularly Joby Fleming and the Advocacy team, has provided me with a renewed faith in humanity. The commitment to providing equity for all individuals is truly inspiring. I have learned and grown personally and professionally from working with Empower.” – Community Partner, 2023

Overall, Advocacy Services continues to be very successful. We look forward to working with new and returning members over the next year and continuing our partnership with community and government organizations.

Joby Fleming
Advocacy Services Manager

Member Services Report

Member Services is a vital part of our community. Member Services brings members together with similar goals and interests while also offering opportunities for socializing, friendship, support, and shared experience from those in similar situations. We welcome the lived and learned experience from anyone, as well as those with cross-disabilities which includes mental health, short-term, long-term, and permanent disabilities. Empower transforms lives by providing tailored, flexible, emotional, practical, and social support. People benefit from hearing from those in the same boat, and we like to connect to others with lived and learned experience.

People with disabilities experience many barriers to social interaction on a regular basis. This past year has been a transition year for members. Member Services has been focusing more on getting back to being engaged with the larger community; creating opportunities for members to become aware of all the different activities and events that are available for them within the City of St. John's and Mount Pearl. We always say that Empower is the best kept secret, and it's time to change that. We feel that by promoting more of our community partners, rather than offering activities and events mainly in our building, we are opening more doors for social inclusion in wider society. Members will become more aware of events and activities that are in the communities surrounding them. Member Services reduces barriers of stigma, isolation, and improves resiliency, self-esteem, and social connections. We provided numbers of different sessions, catered to different groups of individuals with varying interests.

The following is an overview of the Member Services opportunities we explored with members of Empower in the past year.

Dinner Club: Members are very happy to be back and to engage with other members around a wonderful meal. We have broken the group into 2 sessions to ensure safety. Some of the places they have visited are Denny's, Wing 'N It, The Keg and The Bigs to name just a few. This group runs every two months.

Coffee and Technology: This is a group in partnership with Travis Turpin, our AT Facilitator. We offered two-hour sessions once every two months from Sept – May for members to come and learn about new technology and ask questions they may have around their own technology. Some sessions we did were to educate members about Facebook Profile Safety for cell phones, Web browsers, how to use a Chrome Book, and an Introduction to the Cloud.

Nutritional Supports: This program was created because of the Pandemic. We applied for funding through Red Cross and were able to support 167 individuals with disabilities to access nutritional support through gift cards. We have since pivoted to connecting individuals with food banks as well as providing other resources to them around food security. We have seen a large increase in the need for food security in the last year for our members.

Activities: We have been working closely with the City of St. John's to increase awareness to our members around their events and activities. We have also provided feed back around their REConnect program (which people use to register for activities). We are also supporting the City to become more accessible and increasing their knowledge around barriers individuals with disabilities face on a regular basis. We provided active members of Empower the opportunity to access these events for a discounted rate. By doing so we are increasing members knowledge around the many different activities and events that they could attend and be a part of. These sessions are offered on a quarterly basis. This year we

have connected 31 individuals to over 17 different types of activities from yoga, to disco dinner and dance, acrylic painting, learning to paint, the Fall fashion show and the St. Patrick's Day dinner and dance. Members are truly enjoying the events and activities. We also had members participate in a Pottery night at the Craft Council of NL, Halloween fun at Clay Café and Dinner and Irish Music during Frosty Festival in Mount Pearl.

National AccessAbility Week: National AccessAbility week is an important time for people with disabilities to celebrate. This year we did an information session around accessibility and brought members together at Clay Café to create piece of art using mugs and plates, to show what accessibility meant to them.

Christmas Dinner & Dance: The Christmas Dinner & Dance was a wonderful time, and everyone enjoyed getting out to socialize with old friends. We had 91 people in attendance. This annual event is a great start to the holiday season and a highly anticipated occasion by all. Everyone enjoyed the great food, and the amazing company. This year it was even more anticipated as it was the first time for many to interact with each other in over a year.

Empower Annual BBQ/AGM: We held our BBQ at the Rotary Sunshine Park Chalet. We also had a tent from United Sail Works LTD set up outside to protect members from rain and the hot sun. This year's event had 157 members and guests attend. We played many games of bingo, spin the wheel, ring toss and other fun activities. Everyone had a great time and got to go home with their belly full, and with prizes and candy.

Members Survey: We created a members' survey to engage members and find out ways we can improve the services that we offer. We discovered that members may not remember the supports they received over the year. So next year we are creating a survey that will go out on a

weekly basis to give individuals the opportunity to provide us with feedback around our services. We encourage members to fill them out when they receive one.

Students: We were very happy to provide support and guidance to students over the past year. We have worked with students from Academy Canada, the Finder Keepers program, four (4) Summer Students as well as other placements. During their time with Empower we made sure to educate them around the importance of inclusion and accessibility for all. They will always remember that by putting the person first, you will never go wrong.

Volunteers:

Volunteers are the backbone of our organization. We would not be able to offer the many programs and services we do without the hard work and dedication of our nearly 80 volunteers. Volunteers bring many different skills with them, with different learned and lived experiences that benefit those they serve as a volunteer. We look forward to providing more opportunities for students in the future.

We offer many volunteering opportunities including long-term, short-term and one-time volunteering opportunities for anyone interested in giving their time. We have volunteering positions which include Group Support, Tech Room Support, Newsletter Committee, Garden Committee, Empower Board, Inclusion Crew, and more.

We held our annual Volunteer event at the CLB Armoury. We had over 55 volunteers attend and they enjoyed a stuffed chicken breast dinner and danced the night away. Everyone was excited to be back together again. We would like to thank members, volunteers, support workers, staff, and others for their contribution to our Member Services. Without your time,

knowledge, and experience, we would not have such an amazing network of people around us.

We would also like to thank our partners over the past year, including: Public Legal Information of NL, The New Home Community centre, The Newfoundland and Labrador Housing and Homelessness Network, Mummers Festival and many others.

Member Services is committed to providing opportunities for personal growth and fulfilment of the members who join the Peer Support Activities. We look forward to working with you in the coming year, making sure we offer sessions that will greatly benefit you. Please forward any Member Services topics you would be interested in attending.

Amanda Lush
Coordinator of Member Services



Career Services

Career Services

It has been another busy year for Career Services at Empower. **124** consumers accessed services helping them with their education, employment and entrepreneurial goals. And of those, **35** people found short-term, contract, part-time or full-time employment, **10** people started short-term and long-term training opportunities and **2** people started their own business.

Career Services continue to be offered through the independent living lens, meaning people have more control over what terrain their path travels and where it leads. And we are there with them, helping them gain the skills and identify the supports they need along the way.

One example of success comes through a partnership between Empower, an employer and Ready Willing and Able. Ready Willing and Able provided financial support for a job coach, the employer contacted the Career Services Coordinator to see if there were any individuals interested in working with them, and Empower worked with the job seeker as they developed their pre-employment skills and identified possible workplaces they were interested in. Working together, both with other organizations and employers in our community, we can do so much more.

From what I have seen, people who are getting jobs are doing three things well. They are persistent, they know what they want, and they know what they are good at doing. Despite barriers, people are getting jobs and employers are hiring people with disabilities.



My message to the people out there continuing with their job search is to hang in there. Take stock of the effort you are putting into your job search. Congratulate yourself for continuing to try in the face of adversity. Try not to feel that because you haven't yet succeeded that you are failing. Every time you put yourself out there, you are succeeding!

Also remember that finding a job is a job. Hearing that someone else got the job that you wanted can be frustrating. Keep motivated and lean on those who can encourage you. You will get a break eventually.

There are always options. Volunteering, doing courses at night, attending community events, and participating in personal development opportunities can help keep you positive through a stressful job search.

And I hope this year can be your year. Maybe your job is the next one you apply for.

Stephen Quinn
Career Services Coordinator

Youth Ventures at Empower

Empower committed to deliver the Youth Ventures program to membership and a greater audience from May to end of August of 2022. Promotion was completed across Newfoundland and Labrador through social media, an email campaign and in school presentations. Nine (9) youths, and one adult participated in the program and were successful in either planning a business for 2023, launching a new business, or expanding upon their existing business.

Entrepreneurs were supported to develop print marketing materials which were printed through The Hub Print Shop and iDesign, supported by the marketing budget provided by CBDC. Entrepreneurs were also supported to participate in markets and fairs throughout the summer as an additional avenue to sell their products. Food and prizes were provided to participants at the opening BBQ and for participants of the Build a Business Pitch Competition as a final event, provided through the same.

All participants reported that they enjoyed the program and felt that they achieved the learning outcomes and more than was expected. CBDC hosted an awards ceremony at the end of the program, and we are proud to report that 2 Empower participants received Provincial Awards in the areas of Financial Management and Innovation. Participants reported that if Empower offered Youth Ventures in 2023 that they would be interested in returning to the program. Empower was pleased with the structure of the program and the gains that were made by each participant and their individual businesses.

Your Biz

Entrepreneurial Supports for Persons with Disabilities in Rural Newfoundland and Labrador

Funding was received from Northpine Foundation to increase interest in entrepreneurship in Rural Newfoundland and Labrador. Work for this project started with research to discover the common barriers experienced by entrepreneurs in rural communities and then to investigate what additional supports are available to this population of entrepreneurs. Information was gathered through informational interviews with entrepreneurs operating in these communities and service providers that serve the entrepreneurs, in addition to online research. Connecting with individual municipalities was a challenge because of information lacking online. A database of municipal contacts was developed to aid this process, as well as a Facebook page that is connected to groups in different communities to share information.

Accessible resources were also developed and curated to support entrepreneurs, such as cash-flow and business planning templates. These resources will be posted on the Empower website for entrepreneurs to download for their own use. Once the page is active with resources uploaded, it will be promoted through social media using the Your Biz Facebook page.

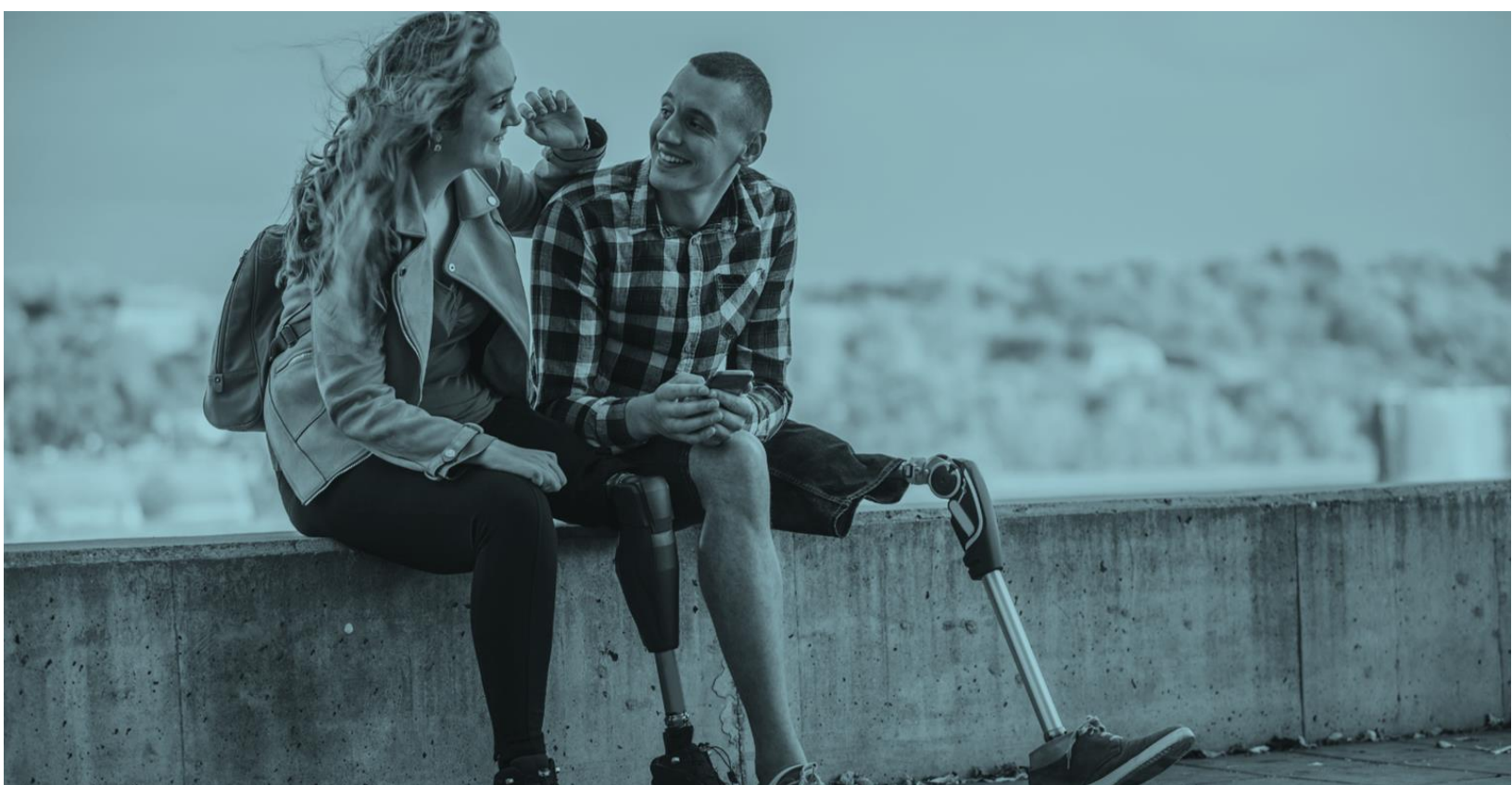
Empowering You

Digital Resources Project for Increased Self-Advocacy

This project was developed in response to continued dedication to the Independent Living philosophy of Empower. Resources were developed by program staff at Empower to support increased self-advocacy for members, and to decrease the need for individuals to meet directly with program staff to resolve individual concerns. Program staff developed these resources based on areas of highest needs expressed by members, including topics such as Home Care Support, Food Security, Resume Writing, and Basic Technology Skills. Resources have been developed to meet the highest accessibility requirements and will be found on the Empower website in the near future. Additional resources will continue to be developed and updated on a continuous basis.

Sherri Tucker

Coordinator for Youth Ventures at Empower, Your Biz and Empowering You



Provincial Services

Building Community Inclusion NL

This year we continue to partner in community and provide valuable information and services in rural areas of our province. We developed further partnerships in the Stephenville area through our Community Inclusion Facilitator, Keely MacIntosh-Hynes. We also expanded into Gander area hiring Aaron Warr as the Community Inclusion Facilitator for that region. Both Facilitators met with organizations in the area, persons with disabilities, and government, providing information and presentations on disability related topics.

We continue to build community partnerships across the province while providing meaningful work experiences to persons with disabilities.

Our team has been involved in the following activities:

- Advancing disability awareness, accessibility, and inclusion
- Promoting Empower, Disability Awareness, Inclusion, and Programs through our social media platforms Facebook, Twitter and Instagram
- Partnering with groups to build awareness of how to reduce barriers in community.
- Assisting local organizations to reduce barriers in their service delivery and events
- Exploring Peer Support Networks in community
- Researching gaps in service and resources and developing recommendations and tools where possible
- Delivering support to access services online
- Providing information and training on adaptive technology
- Coffee & Technology Online Series
- Creating accessible materials for internal and external use

- Engagement with the public through social media, attendance at community events, and information sessions
- Skill building and training opportunities where possible

Our team has done great work throughout the province. We have provided several information sessions, created new community partnerships, expanded on existing ones, and increased our social media profile. A list of activities and events is highlighted below.

Partnerships with Community

- Town of Stephenville Accessibility Committee Member
- Partner with the Women's Economic Council for the 50/30 Challenge Ecosystem Project
- Doorways Implementation Team for Mental Health and Community Services
- Bay St. George Residential Support Board
- Community Accessibility Team – Town of Stephenville
- Grenfell Campus Student Services
- Academy Canada – Western Region
- CNIB -Western Region
- Provincial Airlines

The program provides opportunities for Facilitators to gain skills and acquire training in areas that will enhance their future employment opportunities. Facilitators gain these skills through professional training, online webinars, mentoring from other staff, and self instruction. Some of the training and skill development included:

- Adobe Pro Tutorials
- Deque Accessibility Boot Camp
- Certification for Security Products
- Sprout Social

- Microsoft Administration Training (Microsoft 365)
- Occupational Health & Safety Committee Training – Workplace NL
- Website & Email Best Practices for Non-Profit
- Online Fundraising Best Practices for Non-Profit
- How to create a Social Media Marketing Strategy
- Facebook & Instagram Best Practices for Non-Profit
- LinkedIn & Twitter Best Practices for Non-Profit
- Emerging Social Trends for Non-Profit
- Certificate in Digital Marketing & Fundraising
- Certificate in Social Media Marketing & Fundraising
- Facebook Security Features
- Canva Design and Functions
- Web Accessibility in Mind Conference – WebAIM in partnership with Pope Tech
- Axe-Con Conference
- Building Accessible Services for Immigrants and Refugees with Disabilities Webinar
- Autism and Mental Health Presentation
- Compiling statistical data and analyzing trends for social media.
- Providing document accessibility services to other organizations, municipal and government departments.
- Creating resource guides for persons with disabilities
- Editing and updating Empower website with resources and news.
- Software testing, navigating unknown software, providing feedback on use.
- Disability Confidence
- Bamboo HR
- Microsoft Office Excel and PowerPoint



The program has been rolling out nicely and we anticipate that our activity in rural NL will increase as the program continues to grow. Our social media presence has garnered much attention and we are looking forward to moving ahead and expanding to other areas of the province. Our focus for the 2023-24 year will be Conception Bay North and area. If you or someone you know from the area would like to discuss our program, please give us a shout. We'd love to hear from you.

We would like to extend our thanks and appreciation to all our partners and government funders. We look forward to working with you again in the coming year!

Keely McIntosh-Hynes – Community Inclusion Facilitator, Stephenville

Aaron Warr – Community Inclusion Facilitator, Gander

Jen Mackey – Social Media Facilitator/Resource Developer

Travis Turpin – Adaptive Technology Facilitator

Jim Escott – Coordinator, Technology Services

Penny Abbott – Manager, Provincial Services

Technology Services

Through the Adaptive Technology Program, we work to connect members with technology that works for them – whether that’s a particular mouse or keyboard, a software program, an iPad app, or a new mobile phone. We often work with students who need support in the classroom, employees who need technology alternatives for work, service providers who are supporting their own clientele, and individuals who want a more comfortable way to use their computers or other devices. At Empower, we work with people one-on-one and in groups to identify options and provide support in learning about these options.

Some of the services provided within the AT program include:

- Working with individuals to identify appropriate AT options and providing support to acquire and use the technology successfully.
- Sharing information to increase awareness of AT supports and offering training on a variety of assistive software and hardware.
- Free public computer access, offered through our Tech Space, where people can use computers in an inclusive and supportive environment.
- Partnering with community organizations, educational institutions, government departments/agencies, and private business to support growth in AT services throughout the province and to increase general knowledge of inclusive technology.
- Providing alternative format materials allows all persons access to the information they need. Alternative formats include things such as electronic (PDF & Word), PowerPoint Presentation, Braille, audio, and large print versions.
- Our program specializes in conducting website and app accessibility audits based on the WCAG (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines). We understand the importance of accessibility for all individuals, and

we believe that prioritizing inclusivity is essential for businesses and governments alike. By adhering to accessibility standards and implementing best practices, we ensure that information and services are accessible to everyone, including those with disabilities. Our goal is to create an inclusive digital experience that provides equal access to all users.

Tech Space

The Tech Space offers opportunities for individuals to use computers at no cost, in an accessible and supportive environment. Over the course of this year, we saw an estimated 18 people visit our Tech Space. We have a newly renovated space to meet the needs of our members for one-on-one training.

Consultations

The AT Program offers individual and group consultations in many areas related to AT, including employment, education, skill development, and adaptive technology hardware/software options. In 2022-23 we completed many of these individual consultations.

- Employment consultations could range from supporting an employee in using a new mouse or keyboard, to working with an intern to help them seek out future employment opportunities. (Employment consults = 84)
- Education consultations typically involve working with students to help them acquire and/or use AT in their studies or working with teachers to better enable them to support students with disabilities. (Education consults = 139)
- Skill development consultations are training sessions we provide to volunteers, members, job seekers, interns, and others on a variety of computer related topics. (Skill development consults = 517)

The majority of the consultations we provide are related to Adaptive Technology. An individual AT consultation typically consists of a brief overview of what Adaptive Technology is, followed by a discussion of options/supports, and some hands-on training. It is an opportunity for consumers to decide what technology will work best for them. (AT consults = 320)

Community Work

Over the past year, we've had many opportunities to work with our community partners and attend events related to adaptive technology. Presentations and consultations to CNA (Collage of the North Atlantic), Academy Canada, Go Getters NL and Memorial University, collaborating with CODNL in assisting members in getting AT equipment and meeting with Non-Profits to update their Assistive Technology.

Thank You

Financial support for this program comes from the Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills (Community Partnerships Program), Thank you for your continued support and investment in the Adaptive Technology Program.

Travis Turpin
AT Facilitator/Network Support

Jim Escott
Coordinator, Technology Services

Penny Abbott
Manager, Provincial Services

Social Media

Following a full year of social media posting, feedback from followers has been overwhelmingly positive, analytics show growth on all three platforms that Empower uses and staff have been very supportive in collaborating on program-specific posts that have also been well received. Highlighting staff activities in the community has also allowed us to grow and strengthen Empower's community connections.

Empower's biggest audience by far is on the Facebook platform, as it has been in existence and use for the longest period of time. From April 2022 to March 2023:

- We went from 1736 to 1865 fans on the platform, an increase of 7.4%
- We had 5180 page visits, an increase of 168.3%
- We reached a total of 39,798 people, an increase of 20.9%

Our post engagement score (engaged users divided by total page fans) for the year is 1.10%, more than 50% higher than the current average (0.70%) for nonprofit organizations.

With the purchase of Twitter during this fiscal year, and the controversy that followed, the strategy for Empower's Twitter use has somewhat changed. While we continue to monitor the situation, and continue to post, the focus has been on using this platform to drive more traffic to Empower's website and other social media platforms. This approach has also helped overcome the low character limit.

From April 2022 to March 2023:

- Empower went from 756 to 852 followers, an increase of 12.7%
- Overall engagements, such as likes and retweets, were 1035, up 54%
- There were 35,629 overall impressions made for the year

Empower's post engagement rate on Twitter averages 2.57% for the year. Marketing experts consider a good engagement rate to be between 1% and 5%.

Instagram is the newest social media platform in use by Empower. However, while our followers are slowly growing, the continued improvement of our overall reach has been by far the best on this platform. From April 2022 to March 2023:

- We went from 510 to 639 followers, an increase of 25.3%
- We reached 6791 accounts, an increase of 235%
- We had 280 profile visits, an increase of 32.7%

With Instagram post engagement at 403 for the fiscal year, an 87.4% increase, Empower's engagement rate on Instagram was 5.6%.

It has been rewarding to see the slow and steady increase in fans/followers across all platforms. But perhaps of more import is the consistent and increasing engagement of the community with all of Empower's social media.

The key points to take away from this year's social media performance that will guide our strategy for the next year and help tailor posts for maximum impact are:

- Facebook continues to have Empower's largest audience, as well as the most geographically diverse. Also, it is commonly the only social media presence that organizations, businesses, and municipal governments have, especially in more rural areas. This will be the best platform with which to engage people with disabilities and other organizations across the province.
- While our Twitter account continues to grow and increase engagement, because Twitter's overall demographics are the least like Empower's (by age and gender), this will be a good platform to

reach new followers. Twitter topics of interest also tend to diverge from Empower's content, so the challenge will be to convey our content in a way that is more relatable to a Twitter audience. Due to the character limit, we will also continue to use Empower's account to drive traffic to our website with link sharing.

- While Instagram continues to have Empower's fewest followers, the numbers show that it remains the fastest growing of our social media accounts, with the highest levels of engagement. Going forward we will explore, through research and posting, how to continue these growth trends. Instagram will also be a great tool to engage more with our younger followers and bring more of a focus to current community issues and events. It will be important to remain consistent with messaging while tracking trends and utilizing them to our advantage when appropriate.

In summary, this has been a very positive year for Empower's social media, which in turn helps keep members up to date with events and activities, helps educate the general public about disability and accessibility and connects Empower with other community organizations and the wider provincial community.

Jen Mackey

Social Media Coordinator/Resource Developer

Penny Abbot

Manager, Provincial Services

InclusionNL Employer Support Services

InclusionNL: Employer Support Services started in June 2014 with funding received from the Labour Market Partnerships Program, Department of Advanced Education Skills & Labour. Since we began, we have provided numerous partnerships to many employers across Newfoundland & Labrador.

Throughout the past year we have continued to offer most of our services through a hybrid model, offering both in-person and virtual work options to meet the needs of our business partners who are doing the same. This requires more support to ensure their hybrid work models are barrier-free. Complete inclusion of people with disabilities is not possible without valuable partnerships with businesses and employers. Throughout this past year, we have developed and participated in 50 unique online and in-person projects and business partnerships throughout the province. With our support, businesses grow their disability confidence and increase accessibility and inclusion within their work environments.

Three Streams of Service Delivery

InclusionNL staff provides streams of service delivery in three key areas.

1. Direct Employer Supports

- Staff provide direct supports to businesses based on individual need/request. Through these partnerships, we
 - Provide hiring supports by distributing job vacancies throughout our networks, which include partner disability organizations.
 - Provide businesses with inclusion related supports for interviews (e.g., ASL interpreters, closed captioning, etc.)

- Provide accessibility reviews of businesses so that individuals interviewing can be confident their access needs will be met.
- Through a variety of opportunities and professional development training sessions offered in person and online, we have been successful in developing 50 current partnerships with employers province wide and have increased knowledge in accessibility and inclusion in various ways. These unique partnerships provide businesses with services and resources as a way of introducing accessibility and inclusion to businesses that are interested in increasing their accessibility confidence. One example is our partnership with Provincial (PAL) Airlines. Our staff provided accessibility confidence training to flight attendant managers of PAL Airlines to help them meet their requirements under the Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations.
- We also have provided HR support to Crosbie Group of Companies, Cenovus Energy, Eastern Health HR, and AJ Bell Group.

2. Conferences | Events | Festivals

This year staff from the program provided support to a number of businesses, community organizations and associations who organized virtual and in-person festivals, events, and conferences throughout the Avalon region. Staff worked with organizers leading up to their events ensuring accessibility for patrons. Supports included: helping to recruit volunteers, training volunteers and staff on accessibility practices, and providing supports during consultations. This year we have provided support to St. John's International Circus Fest, Mount Pearl Frosty Festival, the St. John's International Women's Film Festival, the EnergyNL conference, the Newfoundland and Labrador Folk Festival, and the Royal St. John's Regatta.

3. Research

With funding from the Harris Centre, we began a partnership with Memorial University of Newfoundland's SafetyNet Centre to conduct a scoping review and two roundtable discussions related to including people with disabilities in the natural resources sector, including oil and gas, mining and renewable energy. This work will help to reduce barriers for employees with disabilities, while increasing employer's accessibility confidence.

Stakeholders will be involved in roundtable discussions to shed light on areas that need increased accessibility within their field. The second roundtable with our stakeholders will happen during the fall of 2023, where we will report our findings.

Program Successes/Milestones

- Surpassed all our program goals and outcomes with our initial funding contract received from Department of Immigration, Population Growth and Skills.
- Worked with an external consultant to complete Social Enterprise research for EARN-NL with funding through Department of Industry, Energy and Technology.
- Participated in more than 150 unique business partnerships and projects since InclusionNL started.
- Provided accessibility confidence training to flight attendant managers of PAL Airlines to help them meet their requirements under the Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations.
- Ongoing reviews of Parks Canada Sites to help them reach their ACA requirements.
- Completed accessibility reviews of Memorial University's Botanical Gardens and provided accessibility confidence training to staff.

- Gained 659 new followers on social media accounts.
- Provided inclusion supports to over 50 online and in person festivals, concerts and events throughout the area from 2017 to 2023.

Mandy Penney

Coordinator of Business Partnerships

Alannah Green

Coordinator of Logistics & Projects

Kathy Hawkins

Inclusion NL Manager



Garden Committee Report

(Deborah Prim Memorial Courtyard and Garden Committee)

This year, Garden Committee members were only allowed to attend the garden on weekends due to Covid. This was to ensure the safety of members and staff.

We started our clean up in April by prepping the grounds for planting; turning the soil, adding lime and sheep manure to help with the growing of our vegetables. One of the first big challenges of this year was to replace the floor in the shed. Our goal is to get funding to build a bigger, accessible shed over the next year.

We participated in the Day of Caring project which is offered through United Way. We had six volunteers that work with Canada Revenue Agency who donated the day to help in our garden. Our Day of Caring volunteers were amazing and helped us sand and start to paint our garden furniture. We had a great day, and everyone had fun. We want to send out a huge thank you to CRA staff for all your support and help during the Day of Caring. We have gained some new volunteers from this adventure.

All vegetables were planted in the ground by late June. We planted turnip greens, oregano, thyme, parsley, butternut squash, as well as green onions, potatoes, lettuce, carrots, turnips, and savory.

Our student gardeners Lucas and Hailey started in July. They always go above and beyond with the amazing work in our wonderful garden. We are very honored to have them. We would like to welcome any members on the weekends to take a stroll through our beautiful and relaxing garden.

Our harvest took place at the end of September. Our lettuce and turnip greens were picked throughout the fall. This year we did our harvest together and used our butternut squash and other vegetables to make butternut squash soup, which was delivered on Thanksgiving to garden committee members as well as left at the Centre for people to enjoy during the weeks to come.

To end our year, we did our annual ticket draws on International Day of Persons with Disabilities and the second draw was done at our annual Christmas Dinner and Dance in the form of a 50/50. The purpose of the draw is to raise money for the next year. We have some big plans for our garden and a new shed.

Do not forget the garden committee has a recycling account with Ever Green Recycling. There are 4 locations where you can drop off recycling and donate them to the Garden: Elizabeth Avenue, Blackmarsh Road, Waterford Bridge Road, and Torbay Road. All you must do is go to one of those depos, type in our phone number (722- 4031) and type the number of bags you are donating. After that, stick the labels on the bags and leave them to be added to our account.

We want to send out a huge thank you to everyone who gave us monetary or other donations or did work in our garden. We would not have been able to make the garden as wonderful as it is without the support of our members. All the money raised goes right back into our beautiful courtyard and garden. It was another successful year, and we are looking forward to working together in 2023.

Terrie Hefford
Garden Committee Chair

Independent Living Awards Recipients 2022

The 2022 recipient of the **Cecilia Carroll Award for Independent Living** is **Vera Parsons**. Vera was nominated for this award in recognition of her long term and extraordinary commitment to the full inclusion of the people with disabilities in all aspects of society.

Vera has been a long-standing volunteer with Empower having spent 15+ years volunteering with many aspects of our service delivery. For years she was our resident receptionist at Empower greeting members when they called or came in. Vera was also our receptionist for our AGM meetings and BBQs where she was responsible for processing registration ensuring our membership information was always up to date. Vera is also a member of our Garden Committee, where she was always a part of the group who kept the garden groomed and the vegetables bountiful.

The Independent Living Young Leader Award is for a young person with a disability, who has raised awareness and shown outstanding leadership in promoting full inclusion of people with disabilities in Newfoundland and Labrador. The recipient of the 2022 Independent Living Young Leader Award is **Hilary Hennessey**.

Hilary is a young woman who is a strong advocate for accessibility and inclusion in this province. Hilary was the previous Executive Director of External Affairs, Communications, and Research for MUN Students Union (MUNSU) for the 2021-2022 term. During this time, Hilary utilized her platform to revise the communications policy at MUNSU to be more inclusive and accessible. She also acquired funding through community partnership with the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association of Newfoundland and Labrador to purchase an assistive hearing device to make student events more inclusive.

Hilary was nominated for the 2021 Human Rights Award for her disability advocacy and was awarded the Glenn Roy Blundon Memorial Scholarship from Memorial University for her long-time advocacy while being a student. Hilary volunteers with numerous organizations to contribute to social inclusion for people with disabilities in this province. On top of working full time with the Human Rights Commission as our Public Relations Specialist and pursuing full-time graduate studies, Hilary goes above and beyond to represent students with disabilities on both a provincial and national level. Most recently, Hilary was elected to represent students with disabilities on the Newfoundland and Labrador Canadian Federation of Students Provincial Executive Committee. This position is set to begin in May of 2023.

Hilary is also the first Canadian to be involved in the Youth Advisory Leadership Council (YALC) with the national Centre of Learning Disabilities. She went above and beyond to find this opportunity and went through an extensive process before getting selected. As a volunteer on Youth Advisory Leadership Council (YALC), Hilary is an advocate for accessibility and inclusion for students with learning disabilities within the kindergarten to grade twelve system in the USA. She is learning about the political system in the United States and will have the chance to speak with members of congress at the Learning Disability Day of Action. This is scheduled to take place in Washington, DC, and Hilary is excited to represent Canada in this venture.

All of these events and many more are great examples of why Hilary Hennessey is this year's recipient of the Young Leaders Award for Independent Living.

The Social Inclusion Award for Independent Living is for a person, or group of individuals who has worked towards a more inclusive environment by creating opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in areas

such as education, sports, the arts, government services, and the wider community. The recipient of the 2022 Social Inclusion Award for Independent Living is **Able Sail NL**.

The introduction of accessible sailing to people with disabilities in our community has been revolutionary in introducing new recreation opportunities for people with disabilities. Under the leadership of Able Sail NL's President, Matt Debicki, they offer qualified instruction, equipment, and access to both recreational and competitive sailing for people with physical, intellectual, and visual disabilities. To facilitate these experiences, Able Sail NL has been instrumental in making dockside modifications and acquiring various types of lifts to ensure accessible experiences for all interested sailors. As a part of growing within our community, Able Sail NL have been providing educational sessions and demonstrations to demystify the art of accessible sailing and just recently were successful in developing a collaboration with the Royal St. John's Regatta Committee to increase the accessibility of sailing to the broader community by hosting demonstrations during Regatta Day.

The Business Award for Independent Living is for a business who has displayed an innovative approach and achieved substantial outcomes, in supporting the full inclusion of people with disabilities. The recipient of the 2022 Business Award for Independent Living goes to **RBC Royal Bank of Canada**.

RBC Royal Bank have been a long-time collaborator with Empower, The Disability Resource Centre. For a number of years, in partnership with our corporate services InclusionNL, RBC provided numerous opportunities for employees in all the branches within the St. John's area to participate in Accessibility Confidence Training to ensure increased guest service delivery for customers with disabilities. During International Day of Persons with Disabilities, volunteers from Empower, provided information booths in

many of their locations to share information about accessibility services available for customers, such as the opportunity to receive bank statements in Braille and the ability to access ASL interpreters electronically on-demand for their Deaf customers.

RBC has a strong commitment to community investment and ensuring their employees have an equitable working experience. Within their structure, they have developed an Employee Relations Committee comprised of employees with disabilities that offer their experiences and insights to further developing accessibility within RBC as well as a commitment to diversity, equity, & inclusion, and as apparent in the work of their (Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion) DEI Committee.



Photo of the 2022 Independent Living Awards recipients and presenters:
(Front row) Amanda Howlett, Chief Justice Judy Fry, and Hilary Hennessey
(Back row) Two representatives of RBC, Vera Parsons, Matt Debicki and Hayley Redmond of Able Sail NL, and Minister John Abbott

Annual General Meeting Minutes, 2022

Empower, The Disability Resource Centre
Annual General Meeting – AUGUST 13, 2022
In Person at Sunshine Rotary Park
Meeting Minutes – 11:12 AM

1. The Chair introduced Empower Board members. In attendance were:

- Anne Marie Blandford
- Carole Barron
- Heidi Edgar
- Stephen Wheeler
- Amanda Howlett
- Stacy Parsons

Regrets:

- Deborah Gilbert
- Felicia Tupper
- Kristine Strickland

2. Heidi Edgar read the minutes of the 2021 Annual General Meeting.

Motion to approve the minutes as presented:

Moved by: Andrew Dixon

Seconded by: Suzanne Peyton

Motion carried.

3. Carole Barron read the Chairperson's report.

Motion to approve the Chairperson's report as presented.

Moved by: Kim Underhay

Seconded by: Edward Adams

Motion carried

4. Kathy Hawkins read the Executive Director's report.

Motion to approve the Executive Director's report as presented.

Moved by: Elizabeth Wells

Seconded by: Vera Parsons

Motion carried.

5. Ann Marie Blandford read the Treasurer's Report and Audited Financial Statements

5.1 Motion to approve the Treasurer's report and Audited Financial Statements as presented.

Moved by: Stephen Westcott

Seconded by: Suzanne Peyton

Motion carried.

5.2 Motion to appoint **Beacon Accounting Professional Corporation** as Empower's financial auditors for 2022-23.

Moved by: Stephen Westcott

Seconded by: Don Reelis

Motion carried.

6. EMPOWER Board of Directors 2022-2023

Amanda Howlett read the biographies of the new board members:

- Paul Morgan
- Sherry Mercer
- Dr. Amy Warren
- Katie Cashin (Western NL Rep)

The board members for 2022-23 are:

- Amanda Howlett
- Deborah Gilbert

- Paul Morgan
- Heidi Edgar
- Carole Barron
- Stephen Wheeler
- Kristine Strickland
- Stacey Parsons
- Sherry Mercer
- Dr. Amy Warren
- Katie Cashin

Moved by: Don Reelis

Seconded by: Andrew Dixon

Motion Carried

7. Carole presented certificates of appreciation to Board members who retired from the Board this year:

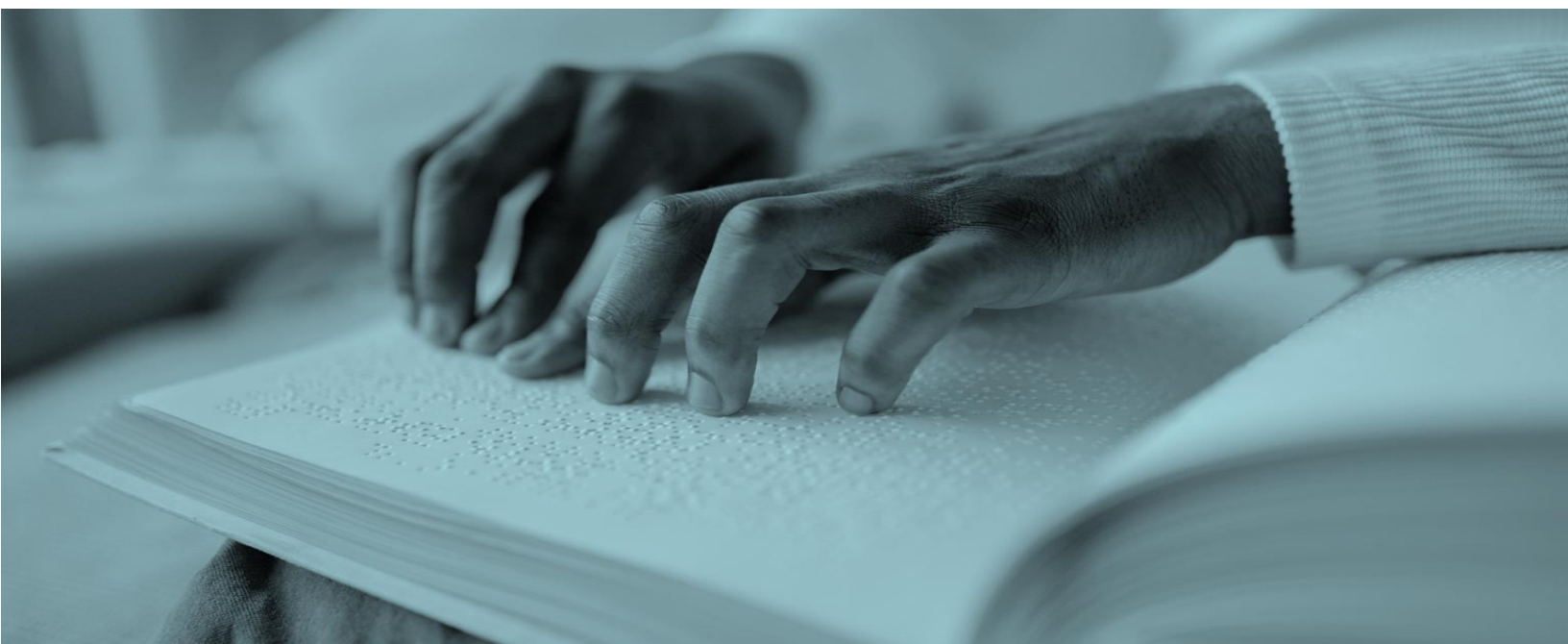
- Anne Marie Blandford
- Felicia Tupper

8. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn the 2022 Annual General Meeting at 11:42 am

Moved by: Elizabeth Wells

Door prizes were awarded.





Front cover photo credit: Eric Mclean via Unsplash

Back cover photo credit: Dennis Mita via Unsplash



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