

**STEPS  
FORWARD**

British Columbia  
Initiative for  
Inclusive Post  
Secondary Education



2021/22

Annual  
Report

# Message from the President

*Shaun O'Leary*

My name is Shaun O Leary. I am the president of steps forward, and I have been involved with STEPS Forward dating back to my days as a student when I was supported in my Post-Secondary Education. Seeing and learning about Inclusive Post-Secondary Education from multiple perspectives, I have seen the true value of this organization and would like to congratulate students on their success at the post-secondary level. I would like to briefly talk about the progress of our Strategic plan and where we are heading with our newly refreshed plan. Our mission has stayed the same and has been recognized across Canada; To support students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in pursuing fully inclusive Post-secondary Education and to support them, their families, and their communities in building the capacity to extend inclusion and fully participate beyond graduation. In our Strategic Plan, we have focused on building a Centre for Expertise to serve as a resource for the development of Inclusive post-secondary education in the province and beyond.

## OVERVIEW

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Though this is very exciting, it is important that we make sure that there is a stable financial plan in place first. There have been many other people crucial in the success of STEPS Forward, from Facilitators who help students succeed on campus, and behind the scenes, to our funders, as well as the families who care so greatly about the success of their student. Without this shared commitment, we would not exist. Due to our success, there are more students across the province attending University than ever. It is clear we are going in the right direction, and we should be very proud to keep supporting the outstanding students who are pursuing their post-secondary education.

## Current Partnerships



# In Memory of Dr. E. Anne Hughson

*Dr. Joe Greenholtz*

I first met Anne Hughson in 2001 the day after I attended the first-ever meeting of what would become STEPS Forward at UBC. Anne was giving a talk on inclusive post-secondary education with her sidekick and frequent co-presenter Bruce Uditsky. I came away from that presentation with . . . pick your favorite - mind blown/awareness raised / perspective forever altered. The things that Anne shared with us that day started a cascade of revelations that changed my life forever. Not many people can say that, but Anne was certainly one of them.

Over the years, I never missed an opportunity to attend the Anne and Bruce traveling inclusion revival show. No intent to trivialize either the content or the presenters. The message was always deep, almost somber; about the commitment required to hold the line on inclusion and integration, let alone advance it. But there was never a hint of defeat in her voice or message. It is, was, and was always going to be a struggle so buckle up and get to it.

To be honest, I know only snippets of Anne's professional life; her academic resume, or accolades I'm sure she won.

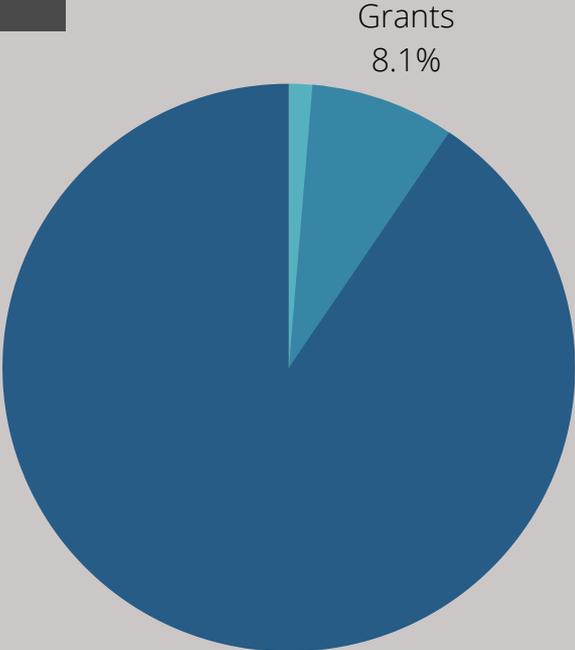
I do know that without Anne Hughson there would be no STEPS Forward. The purity of her vision for inclusion is embodied by STEPS because Anne baked it in from the start.

Anne literally wrote the book on inclusion, growing it from an idea to a province-wide network of post-secondary institutions in Alberta. She generously spliced that plant and transplanted it to BC making sure to visit periodically to see that it was properly nourished and watered, and passed her passion on to Arden along the way. For this and so much more she has my personal gratitude and should have the gratitude of everyone who believes in and supports what is ultimately her vision of inclusion; as practiced by STEPS Forward.

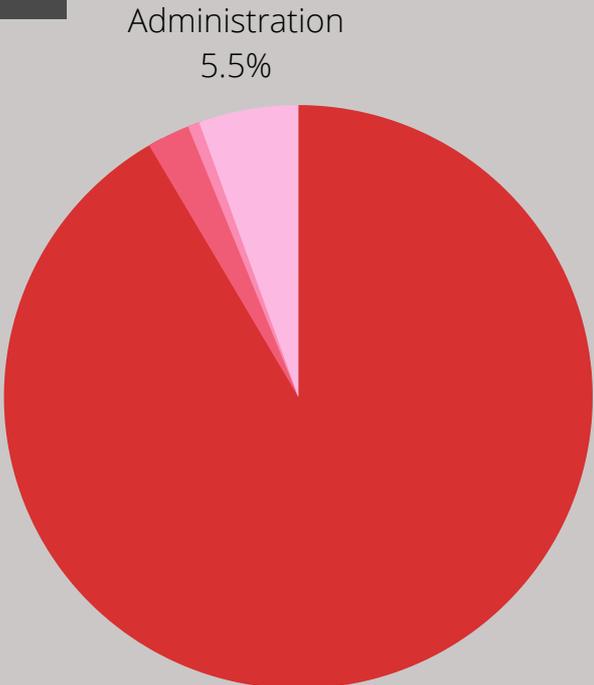


# THE NUMBERS: 2021 - 2022

REVENUE: \$1,125,676



EXPENSES: \$956,611



# Reflecting on the Expansion of Inclusive Post-secondary Education

*Lauren Matthews*

STEPS Forward started with a shared vision of a future that provides opportunities for students with developmental and intellectual disabilities to pursue their hopes, dreams, lives, and meaningful careers in a way that is unremarkable; a future not defined by external, outdated, medicalized assumptions about disability, nor steeped in or contingent upon human services and life-long client-hood. Post-Secondary Education has been the context in which we support students in this vision, and demand has continued to increase over the years as more and more students, families, and academic institutions increasingly see the value of post-secondary as an impactful pathway toward an inclusive life. Though there is still much work to be done to shift perspectives in ways that continue to open doors for students and alumni to pursue their education, life, and career goals, this past year demonstrates some notable successes.

More and more, inclusive post-secondary education is being seen as a legitimate and valuable part of the provincial post-secondary landscape by academic institutions, this has been demonstrated in a shift; historically, interest in expanding inclusive post-secondary partnerships came predominantly from prospective students, their families, and advocates, with whom we would then approach local colleges and universities to open a conversation of partnership. Over the past 2 years, there has been an increase of interest from provincial school districts, and post-secondary administration themselves in stepping up to advocate for an increase in the diversity of students served at Post-Secondary and to improve equity and access in their own local educational institutions.

Since 2019, we have partnered with three new post-secondary institutions; Trinity Western University, Capilano University, and Vancouver Island University. In this upcoming 2023 academic year, it seems likely there could be another two new post-secondary partnerships in BC. This demonstrates a 50% increase in Inclusive Post-Secondary Education partnerships over 4 years, and with two additional prospective partnerships in 2023, will demonstrate an 83% increase in partnerships over 5 years.

# Continued...

In 2023, fully inclusive Post-Secondary Education opportunities will be available to students at 8 of the 25 publicly funded post-secondary institutions in BC and at one private post-secondary campus (TWU). As partnerships continue to increase, it is ever important to capture examples that exemplify the real impact of inclusive post-secondary education in B.C.

At one university a student who enrolled in a program of study, and was fully included in the program planning and orientation for their program, noticed that three Co-Op work terms were a requirement of their program. Initially, it was not anticipated by this department that a student accessing their studies through Inclusive Post-Secondary Education would be included in Co-Op work terms. This student and the campus facilitators saw that the Co-Op terms were a key feature and an important element of student identity within the program. They also recognized that the Co-Op terms were built to support a trajectory toward a career in the field the student was interested in pursuing. This student and the campus facilitators met with a professor that the student had built a strong relationship through their first-year courses, to learn more about the Co-Op terms. This instructor recommended and supported an introduction of the student to the Co-Op Coordinator for the program, whom the student then met with to learn more about how to prepare for Co-Op terms. Facilitators worked collaboratively with the co-op department to identify and overcome barriers to the student's full participation. The student followed the preparation suggestions that were provided to them by their professor and the Co-Op team, and facilitators supported the student to build personal relationships with the Co-Op coordinators and communicating their vision for post-secondary education, career, and life after graduation. This relationship-building approach, coupled with clarity about the impact that the Co-Op opportunity would have on the student and their future career, led the way for the university to remove barriers and provide access to a Co-Op placement.

The student was enrolled in Co-Op in their 2nd academic year, coherent and on the same timeline as their peers in their program. During the first Co-Op term, the student worked with several other students, and they have remained friends throughout the entirety of their studies.

# Continued...

The opportunity to pursue a Co-Op term enabled the student to achieve significantly greater social opportunities on and off campus, a strong student identity as a student in their program of study, and employment opportunities extending beyond Co-Op placements. Many of the student's subsequent employment opportunities were supported through strong references from the Co-Op employers. Certainly not least important; this student now has three terms of paid work in their field of interest on their CV; providing them with the building blocks of a solid career trajectory before even completing their studies.

The opportunity to access a Co-Op placement at one University has had an impact on others. This Spring 2023, another post-secondary institution will include the first student in their Co-Op programs, and a third institution is working towards welcoming a student to access Work Study employment opportunities in Fall 2023. The focus on relationship building has led to the Co-Op team feeling so strongly and positively about the experience of including a student, that they are sharing their experiences with Co-Op programs at other campuses and encouraging their peers to ensure students enrolled through inclusive post-secondary partnerships have the same opportunities as other students to participate and benefit from Co-Op employment.

As the number of inclusive post-secondary education partnerships continues to grow provincially, we anticipate more and more interest from students and an increase in the number of partnerships as post-secondary institutions respond to the desires of students to continue their education and pursue a fully inclusive life. With this, there is a need to work to maintain a high standard for inclusive post-secondary education in B.C. Facilitating real inclusion is nuanced, and often not quick, nor easy, as any person with lived experience, or family who has advocated for their family member knows. What we also know to be true is that working towards inclusion with a focus on relationship building, supports a new understanding of, and increased capacity for inclusion and this is where the real human impact lives; it is the key to sustainable and long-term social change.

# Propelling Inclusion for Alumni Project

*Carmen Lee*

*Andrew Rooney*

The aim of the Propelling Inclusion for Alumni Project has been to understand the experiences of alumni who have completed their studies through inclusive post-secondary education and their support networks. By seeking to better understand the outcomes of inclusive post-secondary education, we hope to improve how the initiative supports students to plan for life after university. Along with interviewing alumni and families, we collected insight from professors and those who work in inclusive post-secondary education to ensure our suggestions align with the experiences of all post-secondary students. We learned a lot through the stories shared with us and we hope that alumni and their support networks felt heard.

The key pieces of the project include interviewing alumni, families, and folks who work in inclusive post-secondary education. We also engaged with families and professors through an

online survey. The narratives and insight we received were interpreted through a lens of asset-based community development, citizen advocacy, social role valorization, and the inclusive post-secondary education benchmarks. The asset-based community development model is centered around nurturing the gifts and strengths of individuals through opportunities to connect with each other. In combination with citizen advocacy's focus on intentional relationship building, we identified that freely given relationships that evolve over time are important to alumni and families. The way that social role valorization and the inclusive post-secondary education benchmarks shape the work of the initiative highlights the need to empower students and their support networks to be able to pursue opportunities and supports that fit their vision for a good life. The ideas that have stemmed from our collective dialogue relate to two emerging themes:

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prioritizing relationship building and empowering students and their support networks. The next phase of the project is an exciting one and is an opportunity to invite current students and their support networks into the process of building a framework for enhanced alumni planning. The project team will be working with a total of 5 students who are in various years of study on different campuses, alongside their support network and inclusion facilitators. By intentionally bringing students, their support networks, and inclusion facilitators together, we hope that students will share with us their vision for a good life and engage with us to find opportunities that support them to live out that vision. We will focus on seeking opportunities for students to build relationships on campus, in their community, and based on their professional pursuits.

Special Thanks to:

