



**Bethesda**  
Faith. Service. Inclusion.

You will be enriched in every way so that you can be generous on every occasion, and through us your generosity will result in thanksgiving to God.

2 Corinthians 9:11

# Lend a Hand 2021

Celebrating 50 Years 1971 - 2021



## The Start of 50 Years

In 1971, Bethesda was formed to provide respite to families with children with diverse abilities. This took the form of Relief Saturdays when parents would leave their child with a volunteer family for the day. It expanded to Sunday School and summer camps. For several years Bethesda organized large numbers of volunteers to provide these respite services in communities throughout BC.

At the same time, the directors of the organization were aware that families were also seeking housing options for their adult children.

In 1973 Bethesda found a property in the Mt. Lehman area of Abbotsford and were blessed with generous donations and successfully built the first home.

The home opened in 1977 and within a

few months, young adults were moving in. It was large; at any given time, it was home for around 18 people.

The people who came to live at Mt. Lehman home were mostly young and energetic. Most of them moved to the home straight from their family home and a few came from the larger institutions after they closed down a few years later. Ann Trudeau, a staff member in those early years, recalls "it was like a big family, we had a lot of fun together."

By 1981, many of the young adults living in the Mt. Lehman home had learned how to do things for themselves, shopping, laundry, yard work and participating in community activities. More suitable living situations were needed where they could further develop their independence.

Supported independent living was the need behind the decision to build smaller homes. This marked the era of the small staffed residential home and the beginning of Bethesda's 2nd decade.

There have been many changes and developments since then, but one constant is the commitment to follow Jesus' lead and support people with diverse abilities and their families.

The other constant has been faithful Bethesda supporters. They have remained steadfast and committed to the organization's ministry, giving their time, donations and prayers.

Read our blog story "Early Years At Mt. Lehman Home" to learn more about our beginnings at [www.bethesdabc.com/blog/](http://www.bethesdabc.com/blog/).

# Message from our CEO



Bethesda is celebrating 50 years! This is a story of God's faithfulness, the faithfulness and commitment of families, self-advocates and people who have dedicated their lives to full citizenship and inclusion of the people with diverse abilities.



50 years ago, our Founders responded to God's call on their hearts to provide support to people with diverse abilities and their families. God's call on our hearts, 50 years later, is still the same.

As I consider Bethesda's history, I think about all the people that contributed: the hundreds of volunteers, the board members, the membership of supporters in the churches, and the many fundraising

events people put on to help Bethesda reach its goals. And over the years, we are grateful for the support we continue to receive, and for our incredible and dedicated staff.

When I reflect on the passage of 50 years, many things come to mind. Bethesda's radical departure from institutionalization to its Christian faith-based, community-centred approach has created an inclusive and interdependent world that empowers and honours all people, regardless of ability.

## Our Past

When Bethesda first formed, it was during a time when institutionalization was seen as the 'answer' for people with disabilities. According to Inclusion BC,

- "People with intellectual disabilities were placed in institutions and lived in these facilities apart from families and communities, sometimes for their whole lives.
- Momentum gained during the 60s and 70s toward deinstitutionalization.
- A 'Community Living' movement was started to help people return to their communities and participate as full citizens.
- This movement was mainly started by families who dreamed of a better life for their sons and daughters.
- People with intellectual disabilities begin to advocate for their own rights to live as full citizens and created the self-advocacy movement".

My heart breaks when I think about the anguish families and people with diverse abilities must have endured during the institutionalization era, which lasted over 100 years!

When families were looking for alternatives, the founders of Bethesda rose up to find ways to support families whose children with disabilities lived at home; families who challenged the advice of professionals to institutionalize their children.

Starting with Relief Saturdays, Sunday School and Summer Camps in 1971, Bethesda grew and responded to individual and family needs over the decades to currently support almost 400 people in 10 different types of services across the province. Beginning with volunteers, to the first staff hired in 1977, to approximately 400 employees.

## Our Present

What have we learned along the way? People with diverse

abilities belong in community and we are only capable of thriving when we thrive together. Since the beginning, Bethesda has embraced inclusion and was committed to bring people home and back to their communities. Throughout the decades of change, Bethesda has been part of a larger movement to include and empower all people regardless of ability.

We have so many things to be thankful for. God has walked through 50 years with us and continues to be unceasingly faithful to Bethesda and the work He has called us to do. We look forward with great hope and anticipation to what He has planned for Bethesda in the future.

"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Jeremiah 29:11

As you look at the timeline on the next page, you can see Bethesda's growth over the last 50 years.

## Our Future

What is ahead for Bethesda? At present, there is crucial and felt need for inclusive and affordable housing for people with diverse abilities in BC. With the success and lessons learned from our Vedder Terrace Intentional Community, we will be looking to develop more inclusive housing options in different communities in the Lower Mainland.

We are making our homes more accessible for people of all abilities. We are soon opening a purpose-built fully accessible home in Abbotsford to replace a 4-level split home. We plan to replace 3 other multi-story homes with accessible homes so the people we support will be able to age in place.

What does support look like in the future? As we continue to learn and grow as a Service Provider, we want to support and empower people with diverse abilities to live as self-directed and inclusive lives as possible. Empowering Self-Advocates is a priority. Supporting them to realize their full potential and become all that God created them to be.

We continue to shift our focus to life-building vs. custodial care, paying particular attention to social connection and belonging. I think Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert say it best in their book *When Helping Hurts*: "The key dynamic in development is promoting an empowering process in which all people involved – both the 'helpers' and the 'helped' – become more of what God created them to be".

I can't help but think of the hymn, *Great is thy Faithfulness* and be overflowing with gratefulness for all that God has provided.

With a grateful heart,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jody Siebert".

Jody Siebert, CEO

# Bethesda's Historical

## The shape-defining events



### 1971

- ◆ Formed in 1971. Families seeking alternatives to institutionalization for their children sought support from their churches to help them support and keep their children at home.
- ◆ The church felt called by God to care for people with disabilities.
- ◆ Operated by volunteer directors (Working Board).
- ◆ Started with Relief Saturdays, Sunday School and summer camps in 1971.
- ◆ Membership Drive among Reformed, Mennonite and Baptist churches.

### 1977

- ◆ Purchased 1st property to build a home.
- ◆ 1st employee hired - finance.
- ◆ Summer camp held at Thetis Island.
- ◆ Opened Mt. Lehman home in 1977. Up to 18 adults moved in. Goal to "encourage the development of self-help skills, social skills and communications".
- ◆ People living in the home raised money by selling crafts.

### 1983

- ◆ Office located on West Railway St. in Abbotsford.
- ◆ In 1981, celebrated 10-year open house with over 1,100 visitors.
- ◆ Services expanded to crisis respite and day services.
- ◆ 60 people with diverse abilities received Community Services.
- ◆ 2 residents of Mt. Lehman home 'graduated' to semi-independent home placement.
- ◆ Started Supported Independent Living (SIL) in 1987.

### 1988

- ◆ Mandate extended to supporting people with physical disabilities.
- ◆ Family care homes started in 1985 (now home share).
- ◆ Woodworking and food services started at Mt. Lehman.
- ◆ In 1987: 21 staff, 400+ volunteers.
- ◆ Opened 5 group homes.
- ◆ Changed title of Administrator to Executive Director.
- ◆ Started Vocational Services.
- ◆ 1st computer purchased in 1987.

### 1994

- ◆ Expanded services to the Okanagan.
- ◆ Board changed to Policy Board.
- ◆ Rapid expansion of homes in Lower Mainland and Okanagan.
- ◆ Purchased property in Kelowna and Penticton for 3 new group homes in 1993.
- ◆ In 1994: 206 staff, 112 volunteers, 99 people in homes and 184 people and families served in Family Support.



# Timeline: 1971-2021



## 1999

- ◆ 14 homes and 12 Day services by 1995.
- ◆ Completed 1st purpose-built home and opened 4 homes in the Okanagan.
- ◆ In 1995, name changed to Bethesda Christian Association with the sun and dove logo.
- ◆ In 1996, celebrated 25 years at Mt. Lehman.
- ◆ In 1997 Bethesda Christian Foundation Society formed.
- ◆ Office moved to Gladwin Rd.
- ◆ PATH planning tool introduced in 1999.
- ◆ In 1999: 340 staff, 363 volunteers and 210 people and families supported.

## 2005

- ◆ New group home in Abbotsford in 2001.
- ◆ Summer camp moved to Stillwood camp.
- ◆ Golf tournament fundraisers started.
- ◆ Annual Cyclathon to raise money for Family Support.
- ◆ Bethesda website created in 2000.
- ◆ Mt. Lehman home downsized.
- ◆ Opened Mephi's Place for Family Support and Self-Advocates in 2005.
- ◆ Community Living BC formed and began outcomes-based management.
- ◆ 1st Self-Advocate joined Board of Directors in 2004.

## 2011

- ◆ Maple Ridge and Chilliwack homes opened for youth in 2006.
- ◆ Opened Mephi's Place for Family Support and Self-Advocates in 2006.
- ◆ Agreement with Sparrows Housing Society for supported independent living housing in Smithers.
- ◆ Person-centred planning approach adopted.
- ◆ Involvement with Hope Haven to repair wheelchairs in Guatemala.
- ◆ New homes: Ladner (2008) and Abbotsford Apartment (2010).
- ◆ Service redesign plan and service levels introduced.

## 2015

- ◆ 1st Executive Director retired (35 years of service).
- ◆ New ED (now CEO) hired in 2014.
- ◆ Mt. Lehman home closed and sold.
- ◆ Diana Buurman award created.
- ◆ Chilcotin home opened.
- ◆ Blue water, dove and cross logo adopted.
- ◆ 398 staff, 142 volunteers, 74 people in residential homes, 117 people in community inclusion, 29 people in home share, 21 people in supported independent living, and 10 people in employment services.

## 2021

- ◆ Vedder Terrace opened in 2016.
- ◆ 5-year Strategic Plan created in 2018.
- ◆ Self-Advocates Advisory Committee started in 2018.
- ◆ Re-brand and name change completed in 2019.
- ◆ COVID pandemic recovery planning.
- ◆ New provincial office built on Emerson St. (July 2021).
- ◆ Held 1st virtual AGM.
- ◆ Self-Advocate groups formed in Chilliwack and Abbotsford/Langley in 2019.
- ◆ Purpose-built Cameron Home completed in 2021.
- ◆ In 2020: 393 staff and 291 people and families supported.



# Accessible Homes

## For all ages and abilities

Some of the people who were in our original Mt Lehman home are still with Bethesda. In fact, two of them have recently moved into another new home this year. Like several of the people we have supported for many years, they are experiencing age-related mobility issues. Homes that once served them well, with multi-levels and stairways, narrow doorways, and standard bathroom fixtures, are no longer easy to get around with mobility aids like wheelchairs or walkers.

The new home is in the McMillan neighbourhood of Abbotsford. It's a 5 bedroom, 3500 sq ft rancher located on a quiet residential street. The home was designed and built for the comfort and safety of the four older residents. It features a lift in each bedroom, a large, main bathroom with a walk-in shower and arjo tub. The wide hallway enables easy access to bedrooms and opens into a very large great room where people will eat their meals, watch TV, do activities and lounge comfortably.

Walter Nordeman, Bethesda's Director of Property Development walked us through the home before the move in date. "We bought the property about 2 years ago and began planning, but once we tore down the original house in April, construction went very quickly and smoothly."

As well as building in design features for increasing accessibility, the home also features energy efficient on-demand hot water and a seamless built-in sprinkler system: no visible sprinkler heads emerging from the ceiling. The house has a back-up generator for continuous power during power outages.

A lot of careful thought and planning went into the home with the goal of it being a welcoming place to call home for residents for a long time. Jody Siebert, CEO, said "We are thrilled to offer people with diverse abilities the homes they need to so they can live fully at all stages of their lives. The success of this home provides us with a roadmap as we move forward to replace other homes in the future."

Take a virtual tour at [www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QkKNX2rfOM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0QkKNX2rfOM)



# Safe Visitation Room at Mephi's Place

The inability to visit a family member or loved one during the COVID 19 pandemic has been difficult for many of the people we support and their families. To alleviate some of the stress, Bethesda has created a safe visiting room to allow people supported by Bethesda to safely visit during the pandemic.

The room is located in Mephi's Place in Abbotsford. Visitors meet with their loved one through a plexiglass barrier and communicate using a cordless phone intercom system. Visitors are given a set of guidelines to follow, which include where to enter the building, a screening process, and other safety reminders while they are in the building.

Visitors can arrange a time through their Bethesda contact. Up to 3 visitors can meet for up to 1½ hours. The safe visiting room will be available as long as COVID restrictions are in place.

## Rietta's story

This story unfolds with parents of a young woman with diverse abilities dreaming of the future for their cherished daughter. Rietta and Wes had been planning for a couple years, the day that Molly would move out of the family home. Molly, now 22, has Down Syndrome and her parents were very hopeful to find their dream home for their daughter.



They envisioned a home for Molly that she would share with a compatible housemate, with 24/7 support. In this home, she would continue to mature and gain independence. They knew it was a challenging ask for Community Living BC, but they were prepared to advocate and wait for the right housing opportunity.

What they didn't expect when they started this process in November 2019 was a pandemic would soon disrupt their lives and restrict them in ways they couldn't have imagined.

Read "Rietta's story" about how God met this family's needs at [www.bethesdabc/blog/](https://www.bethesdabc/blog/).

## Call for Board Nominations

Bethesda's Board of Directors is elected by the Membership to govern the organization. The Board is calling for Members who would like to serve as a Director for a 3-year per term. Board members are able to serve two consecutive 3-year terms.

The Board meets 5-6 times/year with its CEO to review information as necessary to ensure that the mission of Bethesda is being carried out throughout the agency. If you are interested in serving as a Director, please email President Rachel Ludwig at [Life@BethesdaBC.com](mailto:Life@BethesdaBC.com) and a Nomination Committee member will be in touch.

# A New Era of Support for Self-Advocates

Support for our Self-Advocates group is a priority for them and for us. They have so much they want to accomplish and do to help others. United, their voices become stronger and their actions will have greater impact. They just need a little support.

There are about 20 people we support at Bethesda who have identified as Self-Advocates and are enthusiastic about having their own voice within the organization. Many of them live independently or semi-independently and have active lives, holding down jobs, volunteering, studying, and engaging in life as their interests lead them.

They are also passionate about rights, responsibilities and freedoms for themselves as well as advocating about issues that matter to them. Drawing from their lived experience, they have ideas about how to improve accessibility and are passionate about contributing to an inclusive world.

We encourage their leadership aspirations and are committed to supporting them. At present, we are developing resources to help them define and coordinate their vision. Interdependent support equips them to bring their ideas to life.

This year, we will be designating a portion of the Lend a Hand donations to meet our commitment to Self-Advocates by hiring staff to support them. We believe that empowering our Self-Advocates to live self-directed lives is a priority at Bethesda.

## Nothing about us without us



Jack, Jacquie and Hebrina (*in foreground*) are three Self-Advocates in Chilliwack sharing a meal pre-COVID. These days they are more likely to be sharing time together online, socially distanced or wearing masks.

Learn about the Self-Advocates activities, interests and aspirations on their webpage  
[www.bethesdabc.com/self-advocates/](http://www.bethesdabc.com/self-advocates/)

## Lend a Hand

By donating today, you help someone live a better life, one everyday impact at a time.

[www.bethesdabc.com/donate/](http://www.bethesdabc.com/donate/)

## Summer Camp Student Jobs

This summer, work with kids with diverse abilities at our day camp.

You need to be:

- at least 19 years old
- enrolled full-time in a relevant field of study
- have a Class 5 Driver's Licence and obtain a Class 4 Driver's Licence by date of hire

You will be blessed with:

- hands-on experience in Healthcare, Social Work, Church Ministry and more
- making a positive impact on kids with intellectual disabilities
- personal and spiritual growth

Find out more about our summer day camp jobs at

[www.BethesdaBC.com/careers.html](http://www.BethesdaBC.com/careers.html)

Apply by **April 29**

## Student bursaries available

Bethesda Christian Foundation provides \$1000 bursaries to post-secondary students engaged in full-time studies leading to work supporting people with disabilities and their families.

Students may apply for the 2021/2022 school year by requesting an application package from Bethesda at 604-850-6604 or [life@bethesdabc.com](mailto:life@bethesdabc.com).



## Bethesda Christian Association

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Christian Charities  
ACCREDITED MEMBER



## Financial Policy

Spending of funds is confined to Board approved services and purchases. Each gift designated toward an approved service will be used as designated with the understanding that when any given need has been met, designated gifts will be used where most needed. Gifts are acknowledged and receipted with a tax deductible receipt at year-end.