

Abbotsford: Community Profile

Written by Access Abbotsford with Measuring Up at 2010 Legacies Now

Nestled in the shadow of majestic Mt. Baker, in the heart of the Fraser Valley, the City of Abbotsford offers a relaxed mix of city and country living for its residents. As a community, Abbotsford, through Measuring Up and Access Abbotsford (www.accessabbotsford.ca), is committed to the promotion of universal access and inclusion for all citizens in the Abbotsford area.



View of Mount Baker / www.tourismabbotsford.ca

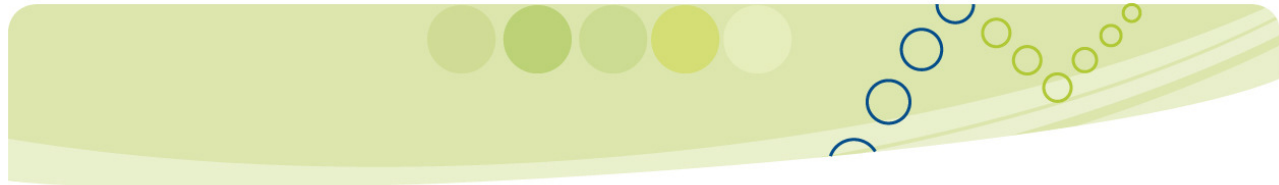
Measuring Up in Abbotsford

The success of the Measuring Up initiative in Abbotsford has largely been due to the significant support the committee continues to receive from the City of Abbotsford, as well as the committee's ability to engage the private sector and stretch resources.

The dedication and perseverance of the Measuring Up working group and sub committees was always a driving factor in implementing the changes that came as a result of our community forum and community input. As a team we always strived to reach out and hear the voices and opinions of those individuals who often are forgotten. People with disabilities, seniors and children are marginalized in many ways and even when we thought we were acting with good intentions, if we had not sought the advice of those whom the changes would affect, the impact from the projects would not have been so great.

We continued to rely on what we called "strategic partnerships" throughout the whole process. We found that many good things were being done around the City in regards to inclusion and accessibility but that everyone was working in their own silos. By attempting to bring together like-minded citizens, service providers, government and business, we could pool our resources and energy to make a difference.

This project would not have been as successful if it were not for the financial support of 2010 Legacies Now and all the volunteer time agencies allowed for their staff to participate. We used a variety of meeting spaces and in-kind support from all sectors of the City. We are especially grateful for the dedication of our five employees who were the ambassadors of the project. It was important to us that the project was conducted by individuals who could bring the lived



experience of having a disability to the forefront, to ensure all project components were practical.

We have created a legacy of our own through the process. We have effectively implemented a variety of community recreation programs for kids with varying abilities. We have partnered with City engineers to reexamine the accessibility of our 204 kilometers of city sidewalks to create new regulations for installation, and criteria to measure necessary change to current pedestrian routes.

We have erected the first model bus stop in British Columbia and have a second model bus stop on the agenda for completion in 2010.

We have engaged and recognized publicly those businesses that go “Above and Beyond” in their hiring practices and accessibility of their business. The business community has embraced these ideas, and we have seen an increase of 350 people with disabilities employed in the last 24 months (our target was 283).

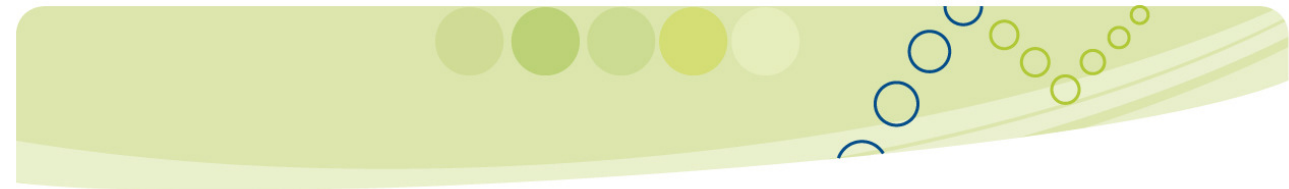
The legacy of the Measuring Up initiative in Abbotsford will continue in creating accessible and inclusive environments for all members of our community.

How Measuring Up in Abbotsford Began

In October 2006 the Abbotsford Social Development Advisory Committee (ASDAC) made a motion to City Council recommending that Abbotsford become a pilot project for the 2010 Legacies Now Measuring Up initiative. The motion was endorsed by City Council on December 4, 2006 and a Measuring Up working group was established. ASDAC appointed Annette Borrows from the Focus Disability Network to chair the working group, and she elected to co-chair Measuring Up with Nicole Misura from the Fraser Valley Child Development Centre. Annette and Nicole then invited more than 20 key community stakeholders to form the working group including:

- Focus Disability Network
- Fraser Valley Child Development Centre
- Abbotsford Community Services
- Community Living BC
- City Parks, Recreation & Culture
- Abbotsford Spirit of BC
- University of the Fraser Valley
- Abbotsford School District
- Fraser Valley Brain Injury Association
- VOICE Employment Services
- Abbotsford Community Foundation
- City, Engineering
- BC Paraplegic Association
- Four residents
- Fraser Valley Seniors Resource Centre
- Fraser Valley Regional Library
- MSA Museum and AgriFair





Measuring Up Assessment Process

In May 2007 the working group held two community forums with a primary focus of establishing three top priorities - the idea is to work together as a community to identify top areas of concern. To publicize the forums, flyers were distributed throughout the community, via advertisements in the local newspapers, emails to organizations involved with individuals with disabilities, and posters displayed in community facilities, such as churches, recreation centres, libraries and more.

The format for the forum included an introduction by a dignitary from City Council, a keynote speaker talking about their disability and our community's successes for access and inclusion, break-out sessions with specific questions, a summary of the event, and an evaluation and conclusion.

It was very important to the working group to ensure the forum would be led in an appreciative inquiry format. Appreciative inquiry focuses on:

- Discovery: appreciate the best of what is
- Dream: envisioning what might be
- Design: co-constructing how it can be
- Destiny: sustaining what will be

Specifically, using an appreciative inquiry focus, we started with examples of access and inclusion in our community that are successful and then built upon these successes with recommendations and actions for the future. An array of feedback was gathered from the forum, and other community dialogues that gave attention to many areas of our community. Through this process, eight main issues or priorities were identified:

- Public transportation
- Physical infrastructure;
- Children
- Awareness
- Business
- Physical and financial access
- Linguistic isolation
- Encouraging volunteerism

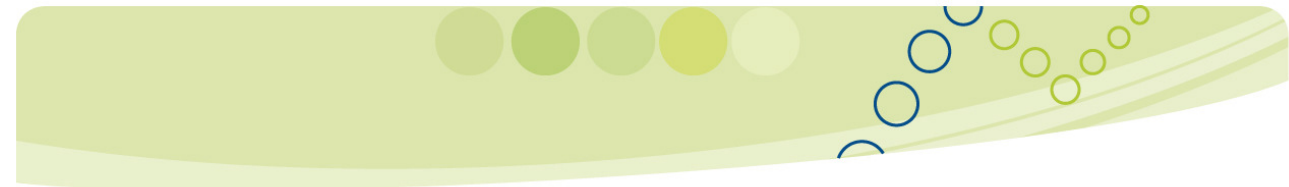
Through much discussion and attention to those skills that the Measuring Up working group could draw upon to successfully support the goals chosen, the group created the following vision and goals for the Measuring Up initiative in Abbotsford:

Vision:

To make Abbotsford a community that is known for its ability to make active participation a reality for all of its residents and visitors.



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Goals:

To create an inventory of materials and explore opportunities that relate to accessibility and inclusion with particular focus on:

- Transportation and physical infrastructure (**Out and About**)
- Children's accessibility and inclusion in recreation (**I Can Play 2**)
- Collaboration and partnerships with Abbotsford businesses (**Access Abbotsford**)

With clear priorities for action, the working group recommended an ASDAC motion for City Council to endorse Measuring Up and the 10 by 10 Employment Challenge, and to support an application to the 2010 Legacies Now Measuring Up Fund for a \$25,000 grant to pursue community research in fall 2007. Access Abbotsford also received \$30,000 in fall 2008 to carry out the recommendations that resulted from the research.

Job descriptions were created seeking individuals who had qualifications to conduct research in one or all of our three areas; preference was given to those who had knowledge and experience with disabilities. Three people were employed at this stage.

Introduction to Projects


Based on the results of the community forums, the Measuring Up working group created an inventory of materials and explored opportunities relating to accessibility and inclusion with a particular focus on: transportation and physical infrastructure, children's accessibility and inclusion in recreation, and collaboration and partnerships with Abbotsford businesses.

Sub working groups were formed and further created strategic partnerships in the community to guide and assist the researchers. Each key area developed specific methodologies for their research projects:

- **Out and About**, the transportation and physical infrastructure research project, chose a test area in the City, and developed a draft check-list measurement tool to evaluate physical accessibility for people with a variety of disabilities. City engineers were engaged in this process, which resulted in a commitment to strive to incorporate the accessible measurement tool in the transportation master plan.
- **I Can Play 2**, the children's accessibility and inclusion in recreation research project, collected data to demonstrate available recreational opportunities for children with disabilities in Abbotsford. The project, completed through surveys and interviews, included both private and public organizations, parents, caregivers, and children with disabilities.



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- **Access Abbotsford**, the project focusing on collaboration and partnerships with Abbotsford businesses, developed a draft tool to measure the accessibility and inclusivity of businesses, non-profit organizations, educational and governmental employers. The project further created a rating system to evaluate the physical accessibility of businesses and developed a program to recognize businesses that go above and beyond.

Out and About

The vision of the Out and About research project was to develop a measurement tool checklist to evaluate the physical accessibility of the streets, intersections and pedestrian routes for people with visual impairments, wheelchair users, scooter users, stroller users and all other pedestrians.

Out and About had two main goals:

- To identify a specific transportation route in the City that would be evaluated for accessibility; and
- To develop a set of recommendations and a measuring tool that could be used to evaluate other routes in Abbotsford and be used as a guide for improvements to current issues and as a template for future developments.

Assessment Tool

The assessment tool was developed to assist municipal staff in evaluating and identifying problem areas, provide feasible corrective actions for areas in need of immediate repairs, and assist those responsible for future development and planning to ensure accessible issues are addressed when building new neighborhoods or upgrading existing areas.

Identifying the Test Area

Out and About determined the test area for the project would be an area close to a shopping mall, bus station, grocery stores, nursing homes, high density apartments and more. Out and About chose an area which the city of Abbotsford had already identified as high traffic for pedestrian use.

Database

The Out and About team are now looking to create and design a database to sort their findings. They have currently been charting all the assessments by hand. The intention is to have a database that can input and sort the findings according to the severity of changes needed. The system will be able to indicate clearly where accessibility is the greatest issue.

Model Bus Stop

By bringing together strategic partnerships, we were able to share funding and support from the Jim Pattison Group, City of Abbotsford, Union of BC Municipalities' Seniors Transportation Initiative and Measuring Up to build an accessible model bus stop.

From the original focus group in 2006, we heard from community members that bus stop benches and shelters were not accommodating. The suggestion was made to create a way for scooters and wheelchairs to pull through the shelter instead of backing in. Benches with arm rests made it easier to get up from a sitting position. Tactile

markings and alternate bench colors enabled people with visual impairments to negotiate the bus stop more easily. Grip handles were installed around the shelter. A larger cement pad encircling the shelter improved accessibility. A second model bus stop is currently being planned.

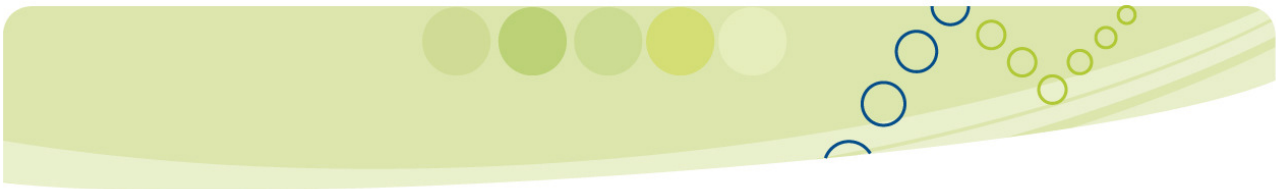


I Can Play 2

The vision of the project was to create an inventory that would clearly demonstrate available recreation opportunities for children with disabilities in the City of Abbotsford. For the purpose of this research, children were defined as those between the ages of 0 to 18 years. Both public and private service providers were included.

The goals of I Can Play 2 were:

- To identify private and public organizations in Abbotsford currently offering recreation programs that include children with disabilities;
- To inquire with children and families as to the recreation programs and services they would like to see for people with disabilities in Abbotsford.
- To support recreation providers in programming for recreation services for children with disabilities.



Dynamos Valley Star Cheerleading
Photo Credit: Nicole Misura



Dynamos Valley Star Cheerleading
Photo Credit: Nicole Misura

Inventory of Programs

An inventory of recreation programs available in Abbotsford was collected and advertised in the Summer 2008 Park, Recreation and Culture Guide. The majority of available programs are offered by private organizations and non-profit organizations. Very few programs are available for children aged 9-18 years. Available inclusive recreation activities in Abbotsford include gymnastics, cheerleading, CLBC Activity groups and other disability-specific programs.

Inquiry of Desired Recreation Programs

In total, 27 children and their families were surveyed to establish which recreation programs they would like to see made available in Abbotsford. Swimming, after-school drop-in programs and martial arts were the top priorities. Other activities included hockey, skating, skiing, dance, gymnastics, softball, music, soccer, and horseback riding. Parents and caregivers also identified challenges to participation, including available support systems (aides, etc.), funding, communication about programs, specialized equipment and facility accessibility.

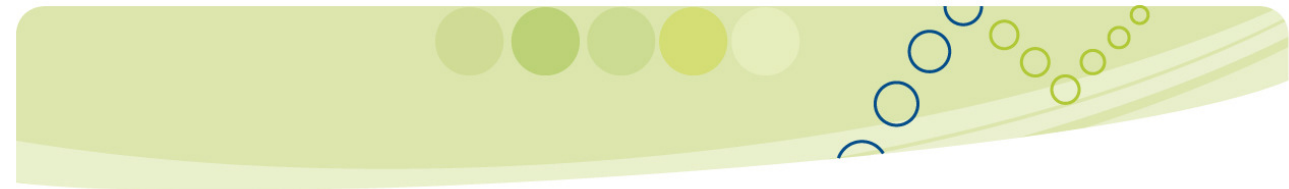
Adapted Recreation Availability in Abbotsford

With an inventory of the recreation programs children with disabilities and their families would like to see available in Abbotsford, the I Can Play 2 group was able to develop partnerships with community recreation providers and support the development of adapted recreation programs at their centres. In fall 2009, I Can Play 2 had commitments from eight recreation organizations to introduce adapted recreation programs for children with disabilities.



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I Can Play 2 also produced 20,000 flyers on behalf of the recreation providers listing the available adapted recreation opportunities, and delivered and distributed these flyers (with permission from School District 34) to all elementary, middle and high schools throughout the district (44 in total), as well as to organizations and facilities with display areas. The barrier of funding was addressed by I Can Play 2 agreeing that a portion of the funds received would be set aside to support those families who wanted to participate in the available recreation programs, but could not do so without financial support. In total, six local children received funding to support their participation.

Access Abbotsford

The Access Abbotsford research project had three key areas of emphasis. The project team wanted to move toward a more inclusive society in which there is no separation between people with and without disabilities. Their vision also included an increase in the employment of people with disabilities in Abbotsford and the development of a system of recognition for businesses, as well as non-profit, educational, and government organizations, that go above and beyond building code and other legislation to become accessible and inclusive for people with disabilities.

Access Abbotsford had four main goals:

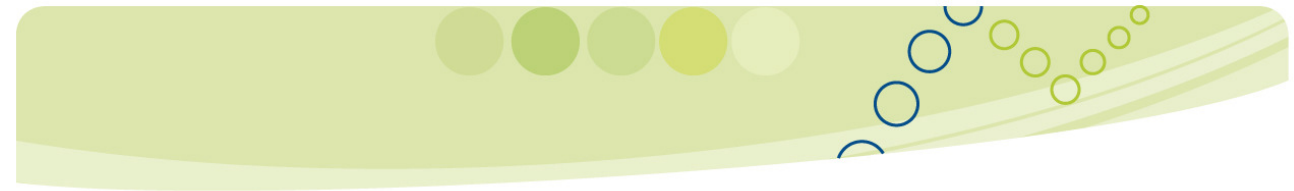
- To create some publicity materials to raise awareness of the 10 By 10 Challenge;
- To identify relevant award schemes and systems of recognition for businesses that go above and beyond in accessibility and inclusion;
- To identify rating systems used to evaluate the physical accessibility of businesses;
- To develop a tool to measure the accessibility and inclusivity of business, non-profit, educational and government employers.

10 By 10 Challenge

The City of Abbotsford accepted the 10 by 10 Challenge in October 2007. The City's target was to have 283 people with disabilities hired by January 1, 2010. The 10 by 10 Challenge was issued by the Ministry of Employment and Income Assistance in 2007. The challenge invited communities to increase the local employment rate of people with disabilities by 10% by 2010. Access Abbotsford designed a brochure to increase local employers' awareness of the 10 by 10 Challenge and local resources available to assist employers and contractors. The City of Abbotsford mailed the brochure, along with a letter from the Mayor, to all businesses in February 2008. A copy of the brochure and media release is available by contacting the City Social Planner. Two months prior to the completion of the initiative, the goal had already been surpassed. By December 2009, 350 people with disabilities had been employed in the Abbotsford area.



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Employment Service Providers

Agencies and programs have formed a network that meets monthly to ensure they work collaboratively and share information towards their goals of employment for people with disabilities.

Business Accessibility Rating and Recognition

Access Abbotsford developed a rating and recognition program to celebrate local businesses and employers that go above and beyond for people with disabilities. Businesses and employers were ranked on a variety of accessibility and inclusion markers, including physical access and customer service.

Lunch and Learn

Access Abbotsford is hosting a series of Lunch and Learn sessions, at which we will be educating employers on the abilities and assets of people with disabilities, in order to build community capacity and increase employment for people with disabilities. This project will increase the organizational capacity of local employment programs and specifically enhance the work of job developers to create employment opportunities for all Abbotsford community members.

Sustainability of Projects

The Measuring Up initiative and its priorities will continue to have success in Abbotsford, largely due to Access Abbotsford's ability to establish and foster partnerships in the community. These partnerships exist with government and non-government agencies, which all share the objective of improving accessibility and inclusion in our community.

Out and About

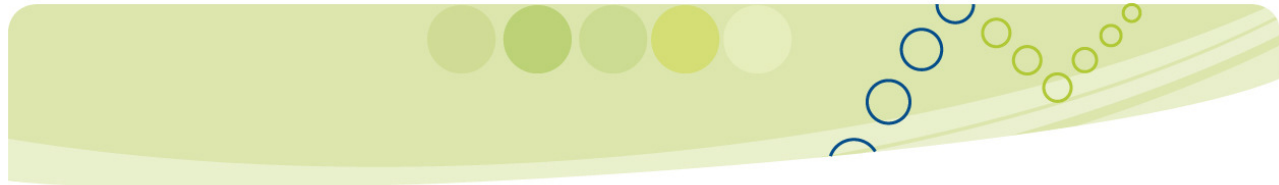
The Out and About project has been adopted by the City of Abbotsford's Engineering and Development Services departments. They are now developing processes to integrate accessibility reviews as part of their routine work. They are continuing to find ways to track the valuable data which they are collecting and to forward concerns for implementation.

I Can Play 2

Of the eight organizations that provided adapted recreation programs in Abbotsford during fall 2009, four have included adapted programming again for the winter 2010 session. In addition, Abbotsford Parks, Recreation and Culture (PRC) has received a grant from Access Abbotsford to educate and train their leadership staff on providing adapted recreation opportunities for children with disabilities. These resources will also be used to connect PRC with those groups providing services to children and adults with disabilities, to establish a network and base for adapted recreation programming.



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Access Abbotsford

The lunch and learn series has received funding from the Vancouver Foundation to continue its work throughout 2010. This strategy has been extremely successful in creating awareness and understanding of disabilities in our community and will increase the capacity of Abbotsford businesses to be more inclusive of people with disabilities in their employment and customer service practices.

Contacts

For more information on any of the Access Abbotsford initiatives, please feel free to contact the individuals listed below:

Access Abbotsford	Annette Borrows	604.864-5770 ext 310
I Can Play 2	Nicole Misura	604.852.2686 ext. 274
Out and About	Margaret Turner	604.853.2281
Seniors' Initiatives	Christina Ragneborg	604.859.7681
City of Abbotsford	Social Planning Department	604.853.2281

<http://www.accessabbotsford.ca>

