



Research to Support Access & Inclusion of People with Disabilities in Squamish Nation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Prepared by:

Ling-En Lo, UBC Sustainability Scholar, 2020

Prepared for:

Joe Kwan, Manager of Member Services, Squamish Nation

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Disclaimer

This report was produced as part of the UBC Sustainability Scholars Program, a partnership between the University of British Columbia and various local governments and organizations in support of providing graduate students with opportunities to do applied research on projects that advance sustainability across the region.

This project was conducted under the mentorship of Squamish Nation staff. The opinions and recommendations in this report, and any errors, are those of the author, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Squamish Nation or the University of British Columbia.

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Introduction

This project seeks to explore the supports and challenges that Squamish Nation members living with physical disabilities face in their everyday lives. People with disabilities often encounter discrimination and barriers in regards to access and inclusion within society. The purpose of this project is to explore some of these accessibility and inclusion challenges through researching and interviewing staff from various partner organizations and service providers, in order to provide useful recommendations to better support Squamish Nation members who live with physical disabilities.

Background

Squamish Nation is a historically and culturally rich Coast Salish Nation. With approximately 4,000 members and 400 staff, it is a vibrant community with almost 60% of its members living on-reserve in British Columbia. Many Squamish Nation members reside amongst the nine reserves from North Vancouver to northern Howe Sound.

While Squamish Nation remains a leader in economic development, some of its members also live with physical disabilities. Squamish Nation has good working relations with partner organizations and service providers such as Lions Gate Hospital, Squamish General Hospital, HOpe Centre, Health Connections Clinic, North Shore Lookout and Housing Centre, Squamish Helping Hands Society, Hollyburn Family Services, and local motels.

Research Approach

This Scholar researched organizations who provide Squamish Nation members with critical services such as healthcare supports and emergency housing accommodations in North Vancouver, West Vancouver, and Squamish. Interviews were conducted in order to confirm accessibility and inclusion provisions for people with physical disabilities using these facilities. Due to COVID-19, all interviews with partner organizations and service providers were conducted by phone or video conference calls. Interview results were then analyzed and categorized to identify areas of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats.

Summary

Interview results showed a wide range of accessibility and inclusion provisions from partner organizations and service providers for Squamish Nation members with physical disabilities. While many organizational facilities and staff were accommodating and prepared to support Squamish Nation members with physical disabilities, some of the organizations and service providers interviewed were not prepared to support Squamish Nation members who utilize wheelchairs for mobility purposes. For example, several local motels did not have washroom facilities capable of accommodating people in wheelchairs. In addition, some staff and organizations were found to be poorly trained in assisting Squamish Nation members with significant physical disabilities, such as those who are blind/deaf/mute and those living with cerebral palsy or using a wheelchair.

Most hospitals within the Vancouver Coastal Health region have Social Workers and Aboriginal Patient Navigators (APNs) who help support patients prior to their discharge. Hospital Social Workers and APNs help connect patients with their home community, confirm available housing options, and coordinate the patient's wellness plan upon their release from hospital. While quarterly meetings scheduled between staff from Vancouver Coastal Health and Squamish Nation are helpful, more frequent meetings will help strengthen existing working relationships. There is also staff turnover, shift work, and re-assignments that affect the quality of client care, especially for Squamish Nation members who are living with physical disabilities and in need of extra supports.

Similarly, staff working in emergency shelters and local motels are also prone to turnover, shift work, and re-assignments, which negatively affects the quality of client service to Squamish Nation members accessing their services and living with disabilities. Staff working in emergency shelters and motels do not always have the proper training required to support Squamish Nation members with significant physical disabilities. More education, awareness, and training in supporting people with disabilities will be helpful. In addition, several facilities were found to be inadequately prepared in accepting people who use wheelchairs. It is important for these facilities to have an adequate number of rooms and washrooms that are able to accommodate Squamish Nation members with physical disabilities.

Recommendation

It is recommended that Squamish Nation ask their partner organizations and service providers to review their facilities to ensure that Squamish Nation members with physical disabilities are able to access their buildings, client spaces, and washrooms. It is also recommended that Squamish Nation continue conversations with partner organizations and service providers, with the goal of increased regular meetings and formalizing relationships. These measures, together with increased staff training, education and awareness, will help provide Squamish Nation members living with disabilities with the supports that they need.