

# Annual Report 2008-2009



Neil  
**SQUIRE**  
SOCIETY

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Manager

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Director of Finance

Suzanne Cross  
Manager, Development and  
Communications

## 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Announcement

In 1981, Neil Squire, a 24 year old pre-med student and basketball star, was involved in a car accident that left him paralyzed from the neck down and unable to speak. A relative of Neil's named Bill Cameron, who was an inventor and research engineer, designed a machine to register a person's *sips* and *puffs* through a straw. The machine translated these sips and puffs to Morse Code, which appeared as letters on a computer screen, giving Neil a new voice.

This would prove to be our first step in linking technology and people with disabilities. When Neil died in 1984, the Neil Squire Society was started with a mere \$2,000, which had been contributed in lieu of flowers at Neil's funeral.

In 1984, Society founder Bill Cameron envisioned a future in which technology would allow "people who just happen to be disabled" to have the same choices, opportunities and quality of life as any other person.

That vision is still alive today, twenty-five years later. The Neil Squire Society is the only national not-for-profit organization that has for over two decades empowered Canadians with physical disabilities through the use of computer-based assistive technologies, research and development, and various employment programs. Through our work, we help our clients remove barriers so that they can live independent lives and become active members of the workplace and our society. More than 20,000 Canadians with physical disabilities have benefited from the work of the Society. Bill's vision continues to guide the spirit of the Society and is present in all of our activities.

We will be celebrating our 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary as well as International Day of Persons with Disabilities on December 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2009. We hope you will join us in celebrating this remarkable milestone by continuing to support us in our work to empower Canadians with physical disabilities.



## Message from the Chair and Executive Director

It was another busy and exciting year at the Neil Squire Society. A couple of highlights include the great success we have had in expanding our high-quality distance-learning experience for participants in our Employ-Ability Program. In addition, with our new emphasis on finding new mechanisms to enhance the accessibility of emerging technologies we are optimistic that the considerable energy we put into the CRTC hearings on accessible telecommunication and broadcast technologies will lead to some ground-breaking outcomes in this area.

As we look forward to next year we will be renewing the Society's strategic plan, placing even more resources into expanding the national reach of our distance-learning capabilities by migrating to a new delivery platform and continuing to build on our relationship with the CRTC to help ensure Canadians with disabilities have equal access to mainstream communication and broadcast technologies.

## Gary Birch Receives Canada's Highest Civilian Honour

On December 30, 2008, Her Excellency the Right Honourable Michaëlle Jean, Governor General of Canada, announced the latest appointments to the Order of Canada. Among them was Executive Director of the Neil Squire Society, Dr Gary Birch, who was appointed an Officer of the Order



of Canada, in recognition of his contributions to the development of the Neil Squire Society, an organization that develops programs, services and assistive technology for people with physical disabilities, and for his determination and ingenuity

in helping Canadians with disabilities to achieve a higher quality of life.

"Dr. Birch has had a profound impact on the lives of so many Canadians. Today there are over twenty thousand Canadians who are now more fully participating in our society" said Clay Braziller, Chair of the Neil Squire Society's Board of Directors. "This does not include the thousands who everyday use technology developed here, or those who will directly benefit from the work he is doing to make mobile devices accessible." The Order of Canada is our country's highest civilian honour for lifetime achievement.

## Milestones and Achievements

**The Society employs 51 people on a full-time basis and has five offices across Canada.**

**Our Employ-Ability program serves in excess of 225 clients nationally each year.**

**Over 85% of our clients achieve their goals after completing one or more of our programs.**

**Since engaging community partners, our distance learning program for Employ-Ability serves an average of 100 clients each year.**

**The Society is a world leader in R&D of assistive technology through labs at BCIT and the Blusson Spinal Cord Centre.**

## Employ-Ability

## Job Focus



Employ-Ability is a unique opportunity for employment skills enhancement for persons with physical disabilities who have never been employed or have been away from the job market typically for more than three years.

Providing a flexible and supportive environment, Employ-Ability takes a holistic approach to employment issues and considers the client's needs and abilities. It's based on three core modules: Career Development, Wellness for Work, and Employment Liaison & Work Experience.

**Offered free-of-charge** to qualifying clients, this program is primarily funded by the Government of Canada HRSDC under the Opportunities Fund for People with Disabilities.

Job Focus clients work one-on-one with our consultants to develop a vocational plan, which is tailored to meet their employment needs. This may include referrals to formal assessments which as vocational or ergonomics, training, referral to self-employment services or access to assistive technology and disability supports during training and employment.

Clients then work with our employment specialists to enhance their job search in order to obtain full-time or part-time employment or volunteer positions.

**Offered free-of-charge**, this program is funded by the Government of British Columbia Ministry of Housing and Social Development under the Employment Program for People with Disabilities (EPPD).

## Computer Comfort

Computer Comfort is the perfect starting point for persons with physical disabilities who want to gain basic computer skills, increase their independence, and reach their personal goals. The program provides one-on-one tutoring in skills such as word processing, email or the internet; access to the most advanced assistive devices and software; provision or refurbished used computers if required, and ongoing maintenance support. Participants work with volunteer tutors once-a-week to gain basic computer skills in a flexible, client-centered environment.

**Offered free-of-charge**, this program is primarily funded by the Province of British Columbia through a Direct Access Program Grant.



## Making the Web a More Accessible Place

The Neil Squire Society creates opportunities for independence for individuals who have physical disabilities. One of our strategies is job development, and an important tool in that process is the National Occupation Classification (NOC) by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC).

The NOC lets clients and job developers learn the national code that a career falls under and that code is powerful in using other government and private employment resources to assist in finding workplace information, training, and job postings.

Until recently, the HRSDC NOC site, while adhering to internationally established W3C web accessibility standards, was not providing a service that was actually useable to persons with screen readers. Visual impaired users were unable to scan NOC web pages. They had to listen to every page in its entirety and try to remember where things were on a site with over 1000 sub-pages. While possible, this should not be realistically expected of anyone.

Neil Squire Society employee Ryan Thomas contacted the Products and Services Department of the HRSDC site, asking for the right to rebuild their site in a Neil Squire Society web space so that our visually impaired clients could make use of it. His intention was to build an accessibility bridge that exceeded basic W3C standards. What came of the process was something that no one expected.

Ryan began a dialogue with Amy Read, who at first was reluctant to allow the Neil Squire Society to reproduce the HRSDC content. Ryan explained how visually impaired persons experience their webpage and the internet as a whole. He then introduced the team at HRSDC to some tools that would let them simulate the experience. After that, the need was recognized but a solution was still withstanding.

Ryan went on to develop a proof of concept for what an accessible version of the HRSDC site would look like and shared the source code behind it. He spoke to Amy over the phone and explained what they would likely have to do to implement it on their side.



Part of the explanation was direction on what they would likely have to actually do, some script to accomplish it, and reassurances that it was probably an hour's work at most.

The changes were implemented over a period of several days, and the HRSDC and NOC web resources became useable. Ryan and the HRSDC team were proud of what they had accomplished in such a short period of time. Awareness of an issue was raised and quickly resolved through the sharing of expertise and a willingness on both ends to see it through. The source code on the new pages ended up looking an awful lot like the code Ryan shared with them, fortunately, he's alright with that!

**“Ryan went on to develop a proof of concept for what an accessible version of the HRSDC site would look like and shared the source code behind it.”**

## Lee Ann Builds Communication Skills

Lee Ann, currently a participant in Neil Squire Society's Computer Comfort and Employ-Ability programs, is employed as a volunteer as she works toward a paying position in the social services field.

Lee Ann has scoliosis and osteoporosis, which require her to use a walker to get around. She begins most days with a four-hour physiotherapy session. Pain and lack of sensation in her hands and feet are some of the challenges she faces every day. Despite these obstacles, Lee Ann brings her sense of humour everywhere she goes.

To access the computer, Lee Ann uses a trackball and a program available in Windows called Sticky Keys. She is learning how to more effectively use Microsoft Word, email and the internet. She currently uses the internet to search for employment opportu-



nities and has been emailing her resume and cover letter to potential employers.

Lee Ann's goal is to work in the social services field. She recently began volunteering as a ticket-seller for 50-50 draws at Ottawa Senators hockey games. The draws raise funds for the Ottawa Senators Foundation which provides financial and in-kind support for organizations focusing on child and youth services.

Lee Ann is excited about her new volunteer position, explaining, "On the surface, selling tickets doesn't seem related to social services, but I'm telling people about the work of the Ottawa Senators Foundation and building my communication skills and self-confidence at the same time." She believes that this networking opportunity could lead to employment with one of the agencies the Senators Foundation supports.

## Steven Finds Success In Distance Learning

Steven, who hails from Red Deer, Alberta, was born two and a half months prematurely. A lack of oxygen to the brain at birth resulted in Cerebral Palsy. The Cerebral Palsy caused Steven's feet to be turned inward which meant that he was falling several times a day. It was difficult for him to find and keep a job because he was falling so often. Steven became very frustrated and was going from job to job with little confidence.

When Steven moved to Weyburn, Saskatchewan, he finally had the surgery he had been waiting for his entire life. Doctors broke his tibia in five places and snapped his ankle in order to correctly place them. Steven underwent painful and intense physiotherapy, and eventually learned how to walk again.

In August of 2008, Steven met with Fred Sandeski, Executive Director of the Community Low Income Coalition (CLIC) and Distance Learning Partner for the Neil Squire Society's Employ-Ability program in Weyburn, Saskatchewan. Fred discussed the Employ-Ability program with Steven and invited him to attend. Steven jumped on the opportunity and joined the program right away.

During his time in the Employ-Ability program, Steven learned about work skills as well as his own abilities and capabilities. His self esteem improved and he started to believe that he had skills to offer. Steven found great success in the Employ-Ability program, and by the end of it he was offered and accepted a job at Suds City gas station as a gas attendant. Steven reports that he plans on holding down this job for quite some time as it makes him feel capable and his employer is very accommodating to his needs.



## Judy Navigates Her Way to Success



Judy, of the Penticton Indian Band, recently graduated from the very successful *Community Navigators Peer Program in the Okanagan*. The program recruits and trains Aboriginal peers and elders with disabilities to provide peer support services to other Aboriginals with disabilities who live on reserves. Community Navigators direct peers to available programming and services in their communities, help them to achieve quality of life goals, and increase self-confidence and independence.

Judy, also a past participant of the Neil Squire Society Employ-Ability program, was part of the first group of graduates from the Community Navigators program. She has recently retired from her maintenance and cleaning job at the Band office, and she sees the Community Navigator program as a timely way for her to learn additional skills she can use to coach and mentor youth, and assist others that need direction.

Success has come quickly to Judy, who is now a volunteer youth mentor with *Pulling Together*—a canoe rowing program that has become recognized across the province. Pulling Together has rowed from Vancouver to Victoria. Pulling Together has also been invited to row across the Great Lakes in Ontario, as well as from England to Scotland.

Judy feels the Community Navigators program has helped her put her ideas and feelings into words so she can share them with others in her journey.

## Amy Finds Success After Tragedy

Just three months short of receiving her BA in Communication, Amy Chan had a tragic accident while snowboarding that left her with a brain injury. Today she walks with a walker or uses a wheelchair and has a deep brain stimulator implant to help her stand upright.

Amy speaks English, Cantonese, Mandarin, and some Korean. She has a wonderful élan about her and she is a very optimistic person, however, she has severe issues with short term memory and must take exact notes in order to keep track of what she has done and what needs to be accomplished.

Amy enrolled in the Employ-Ability program, and with the help of staff, focused on finding a job that would match her compassion and her willingness to help others. She recently secured a position at the Richmond Centre for Disability. Amy is now working two days a week as an ESL coach, tutoring and supporting clients. Amy has a second opportunity for a part-time job in January 2010 and she is excited about moving toward more hours and expanding her work experience.



**“Amy enrolled in the Employ-Ability program, and with the help of staff, focused on finding a job that would match her compassion and her willingness to help others.”**

## A Great Action Plan For Employment Pays Off

## CRTC Hearings on Accessibility



For several years, 42 year-old Troy maintained all the equipment at a bustling lumber mill in New Brunswick.

During a busy day at work, Troy sustained a serious injury to his right

leg and he could not return to his job. His employer was unable to accommodate him in any other position, so he was forced to leave the lumber industry.

Troy was unsure of what other occupations might interest him, so he joined the Neil Squire Society's 12 week Employ-Ability Program in Fredericton in October of 2006.

During his time in the program, Troy demonstrated an interest in working with computers and the Employ-Ability Program helped him explore different occupations in which he might use this new-found interest. He prepared an Employment Action Plan that guided him in identifying realistic action items that he could work on to accomplish his new employment goal of computer technician.

One of those action items was to acquire formal education and training. Upon completion of the Employ-Ability Program, Troy enrolled in the Information Systems Specialist Plus program at CompuCollege in Fredericton.

Troy graduated in May 2009 and returned to the Neil Squire Society for assistance as he began the job search phase of his Employment Action Plan. The staff was able to identify several employers in the Fredericton area who might be interested in Troy, and set up interviews for him. To prepare him, they reviewed and practiced the interviewing skills that Troy had learned two years earlier in the Employ-Ability program.

With the Neil Squire Society's assistance and the guidance of a solid Action Plan for Employment developed in the Employ-Ability Program, Troy successfully secured employment in August, 2009 with Sirius Solutions Inc.

The Neil Squire Society, as part of its key mandate to enhance accessibility of emerging technologies, placed a lot of time and effort into the recent CRTC hearings on accessibility. As a result of this work we were successful in convincing the CRTC to adopting at least part of our recommendations in their ruling based on those hearings which came out in July 2009. The key part of that ruling in terms of our participation and our area focus is as follows:

"That, by 21 October 2009, all WSPs (Wireless Service Providers) offer and maintain in their inventories at least one type of wireless mobile handset that will provide access to wireless service by persons who are blind and/or have moderate-to-severe mobility or cognitive disabilities." Additionally, "The Commission requests that WSPs consult with parties representing persons with disabilities on an ongoing basis to determine which handsets they will make available to address the needs of persons with disabilities. Also in consultation with these groups, the Commission requests that the service providers provide reasonable technical and lifecycle support of these handsets in order to address unique needs, such as those imposed by assistive technologies."

This ruling has now opened up another major front of activity for the Neil Squire Society as we look forward to working with the cell phone service providers to ensure they have accessible handset devices across the full range of persons with disabilities. We have already had discussions with both Telus and Bell Canada as a result of this ruling and we are continuing to explore with both those companies ways in which we can work together to meet requirements of this ruling. It is also opened up a new opportunity to continue to work with the CRTC and we have been very active in pursuing a relationship with both senior staff and commissioners at the CRTC.

These ongoing efforts related to the CRTC and this ruling is significantly supported by our SDPP grant funding and we could not do this work without such support. We believe this work will have an important impact on a key area of a newly emerging aspect of accessibility which is crucial that it be addressed to ensure the inclusion of Canadians with disabilities. The Neil Squire Society also responded to the CRTC ruling with a widely circulated press release.



### **Friends for Abilities Circle Members**

Cathy Beaumont  
Gary Birch  
Clay Braziller  
Don Danbrook  
Don Evans  
Bruce Gregg  
Diana Hall  
Mary Frances Laughton  
Frank Malinka  
John McAlpine  
Karen McDonald  
Greg Pyc  
Don Rix  
Mike Satterfield  
Syd Scott  
Paul Shore  
Bernie Simpson  
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Lisa Thompson  
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## **Thank You to Our Donors 2008—2009**

### **Major Donors**

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### **Our Government Partners Include**

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Province of British Columbia  
Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General  
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Government of New Brunswick - Department of  
Postsecondary Education, Training and Labour  
Elections New Brunswick  
Worksafe New Brunswick  
Ministry of Advanced Education, Employment and  
Labour, Programs for Adults with Disabilities

## STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS YEAR ENDED MARCH 31

<b>REVENUE</b>	<b>2009 \$</b>	<b>2008 \$</b>
<b>Current</b>		
Cash	62,126	263,976
Restricted cash	90,000	60,006
Accounts Receivable	564,340	460,390
Prepaid Expenses and other assets	22,064	39,088
	<b>738,530</b>	<b>823,460</b>
Capital Assets	65,882	84,611
	<b>804,412</b>	<b>908,071</b>
<b>Liabilities</b>		
<b>Current</b>		
Accounts Payable and accrued liabilities	138,630	45,116
Deferred revenue	232,421	387,759
	<b>371,051</b>	<b>432,875</b>
Deferred contributions related to capital assets	22,934	65,001
Total Liabilities	<b>393,985</b>	<b>497,876</b>
Net Assets	410,427	410,195
	<b>804,412</b>	<b>908,071</b>

Extracted from the complete Audited Financial Statements. Complete Audited Financial Statements are available through the Burnaby office.

## STATEMENT OF OPERATIONS YEAR ENDED MARCH 31

<b>REVENUE</b>	<b>2009 \$</b>	<b>2008 \$</b>
Grants	2,575,773	2,632,657
Services	1,078,800	1,011,669
Training fees	165,437	170,224
Gaming	76,073	61,674
Donations	118,313	118,103
Interest and Other	7,976	17,800
	<b>4,022,372</b>	<b>4,012,127</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
	2,440,318	2,255,712
Salaries and benefits	531,060	513,052
Consulting and contracts	368,970	363,908
Rent	150,017	151,904
Equipment lease and maintenance	104,911	174,870
Client Tuitions	104,896	154,812
Travel	89,740	81,754
Material and supplies	71,344	84,314
Telecommunications	32,375	48,062
Marketing and program development	31,676	59,081
Insurance	22,189	22,254
Other	21,510	23,515
Professional development	15,659	16,304
Postage and courier	9,020	7,959
Legal and audit	9,015	12,182
Honorariums	2,990	1,680
	<b>4,005,690</b>	<b>3,971,363</b>
<b>Revenue over (under) expenses before other items</b>	<b>16,682</b>	<b>40,764</b>
<b>OTHER ITEMS</b>		
Amortization of deferred contributions related to capital assets	42,067	63,291
Amortization of capital assets	(58,517)	(65,464)
	<b>232</b>	<b>38,591</b>
<b>Revenue over (under) expenses for the year</b>	<b>232</b>	<b>38,591</b>

Extracted from the complete Audited Financial Statements. Complete Audited Financial Statements are available through the Burnaby office.

**Scientific Advisory Board**

Barry Allen  
John McAlpine  
Anthony Phillips  
Mike Satterfield

**Neil Squire Solutions Advisory Board**

Rob Attwell  
Catherine Fast  
Ed Levy

**Client Services Advisory Board**

Laurie Dawn Hill  
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Tom Tiranishi

**Advisors**

Pamela Goossen  
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Julia Levy  
Mike Satterfield  
Stephen Owen

**Audit And Financial Governance Committee**

Don Danbrook  
Doug Purdie

**Neil Squire Society**

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*Celebrating 25 Years of Empowering Canadians With  
Disabilities Using Technology, Knowledge, And Passion*