

The Self-Manager

CILT • Centre for Independent Living in Toronto • A publication for Direct Funding Program participants

Summer 2026



Adaptive water-skiing

Summer weather tempts many people to spend more time outdoors. Adaptive water-skiing can be a great way for people with disabilities to enjoy the water.

Jake Thomas (inset photo above), a former competitive water-skiier and Self-Manager since 2019, says there are several different modifications available in adaptive water-skiing, “so, anybody can do it.” Depending on their ability, the individual may sit independently atop a single large ski (1 foot wide and 7 feet long) while holding a handle

or T-bar or be enclosed in a “cage” for stability while accompanied on either side by able-bodied skiers.

Adaptive water-skiing is available in various areas in Ontario; for the curious, there will be “give-it-a-try” sessions around the first week of August.

For more information about those sessions, check the adaptive water-skiing page on the Spinal Cord Injury of Ontario website for updates:

sciontario.org/uncategorized/adaptive-waterskiing-with-scio



**2027 CALENDAR
PHOTO REQUEST**

please see page 8 for details.

Keep in Touch



CILT Direct Funding staff can be reached by telephone at:

416-599-2458/1-800-354-9950, fax at 416-599-3555 or by e-mail.

MAHA ALIO

Project Manager Ext. 303
maha.alio@cilt.ca

JESSICA AYOUB

Intake Manager Ext. 299
jessica.ayoub@cilt.ca

MARLENE BENEDICTO

Intake and Resource Facilitator Ext. 270
marlene.benedicto@cilt.ca

CHARLOTTE BOYLE

Bookkeeping Report Reviewer
Ext. 307
charlotte.boyle@cilt.ca

THOMAS CHAPPEL

Intake Coordinator Ext. 235
thomas.chappel@cilt.ca

ELAINE CHU

Regional Report Advisor Ext. 292
elaine.chu@cilt.ca

JOELLA CONNAUGHT KINGA

Community and Outreach Facilitator
Ext. 245
joella.connaught@cilt.ca

HADEEL DAJANI

Review and Audit Advisor Ext. 222
hadeel.dajani@cilt.ca

KATE DEACON

Policy Advisor Ext. 288
kate.deacon@cilt.ca

LEISA DEBONO

Senior Program Manager Ext. 233
leisa.debono@cilt.ca

ABDULLAH DURANAI

Financial Controller Ext. 273
abdullah.duranai@cilt.ca

MARISA FALZONE

Senior Report Coordinator and Advisor
Ext. 231
marisa.falzone@cilt.ca

ERNIE GALLOWAY

Agreement and Resource Administrator
Ext. 300
ernie.galloway@cilt.ca

JENN JENSEN

Regional Resource Facilitator Ext. 306
jenn.jensen@cilt.ca

NICOLA KAY (On leave)

Review and Audit Advisor Ext. 230
nicola.kay@cilt.ca

MADÉLINE LAMOVSEK

Senior Community Facilitator Ext. 302
madeline.lamovsek@cilt.ca

LEANNE LARMONDIN

Communications and Resources Manager
Ext. 240
leanne.larmondin@cilt.ca

OLIVIA LONDON

Interview Eligibility Advisor Ext. 305
olivia.london@cilt.ca

ZULEMA LIVIAS

Intake Facilitator Ext. 296
zulema.livias@cilt.ca

BHAVYA MEHTA

Bookkeeping Report Reviewer Ext. 274
bhavya.mehta@cilt.ca

ERIN PARSONAGE

Senior Community Facilitator Ext. 295
erin.parsonage@cilt.ca

ELIZABETH RODRIGUEZ

Bookkeeping Report Reviewer Ext. 272
elizabeth.rodriquez@cilt.ca

MICHAEL MAREK SPARROW

Regional Resource Facilitator Ext. 304
michael.mareksparrow@cilt.ca

JOHN TAM

Database Administrator Ext. 234
john.tam@cilt.ca

CATHY TANG

Bookkeeping Report Reviewer Ext. 290
cathy.tang@cilt.ca

MARLENE URSABIA

Intake Administrator Ext. 227
marlene.ursabia@cilt.ca

DANIELLE VINCIGUERRA

Financial Assurance Coordinator
Ext. 236
danielle.vinciguerra@cilt.ca

DESIRÉE WALSH

Community Facilitator Ext. 243
desiree.walsh@cilt.ca



The Direct Funding Program and the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto are proud to be sponsors of AccessFest (accessfest.ca), a festival and movement dedicated to celebrating accessibility, and disability inclusion. This is the second year of the festival, which takes place Saturday, June 6, at David Pecaut Square in downtown Toronto. AccessFest was created by the team behind AccessNow, an app and movement that promotes sharing accessibility information. Its chief executive officer is Maayan Ziv, a Self-Manager.

Levelling the playing field

By Michael Marek Sparrow

It's game on for Neil Allen, a Self-Manager in the Kingston area. ▶



Azeron Cyborg II controller



Accessibility in gaming might not appear in the headlines often, but up to 30 per cent of the estimated 2.5 billion gamers have disabilities, according to ablegamers.org. In response, game studios and publishers are more focused on accessibility in game design. When games (or anything else, for that matter) are made more accessible for people with disabilities, the user experience improves for everyone. This is especially the case when it comes to game controllers. The Azeron Cyborg II controller lets users program dozens of buttons to customize how they interact

with a game. Instead of navigating a keyboard, everything is controlled with one hand that stays stationary. Originally designed for people with disabilities, it often shows up at e-sports events, used by individuals with and without disabilities.

Accessories like the Xbox Kinect camera track the movement of a user's body. Today, more specialized cameras and controllers allow users to control a game using facial expression and eye tracking, all using free software like PlayAbility. (Pro versions of the software

are available with a referral from a doctor or occupational therapist.) These types of software allow individuals to use tools they already have; cameras, microphones, cell phones, mice, and keyboards can all be customized based on the ability and needs of the users.

If you want to get back into retro games like Space Invaders or Super Mario, or you want to try competitive fighting games, there are controllers, software, resources, and friendly communities available!

Amy Adair, a Sudbury Self-Manager, is a member of the Rolling Thunder basketball team for Independent Living Sudbury Manitoulin; the team had the opportunity recently to display their skills at halftime during a Sudbury Five basketball game.



Dreaming of a summer vacation?

Travel tips

By Cathy Tang

As a Self-Manager on the Direct Funding Program, you can absolutely travel with an attendant – it just takes a bit of planning. Before booking your flight, you should connect with your local Direct Funding staff, who can review the details with you and answer any questions.

In general, you have two attendant services options: you can either bring your own attendant or arrange to hire someone locally at your destination. Keep in mind that if you choose to travel with your own attendant, you are responsible for covering their travel-related expenses such as flights, accommodations, and meals. Direct Funding Program staff can help you determine the appropriate amount to pay your staff or a local contractor, since you may need more or less assistance than when you are at home, depending on factors like the accessibility of the location and not requiring meal preparation. A few last-minute pointers:

- As you start organizing your trip, be sure to connect with Direct Funding staff before finalizing any bookings;
- You'll need to provide details of additional assistance tasks you may require while away, along with your travel details – including destination, travel dates, and the name(s) of your attendant(s).
- Self-Managers are permitted to use program funds for up to 21 days outside Ontario and are required to notify the program when you return home.



Rattray Marsh Conservation Area (Mississauga)

Accessible Outdoor Spaces in Ontario: Trails & Beaches

By Madeline Lamovsek

Spending time outdoors is a simple yet powerful way to support both physical and mental well-being. Across Ontario, accessible trails and beaches are making it easier for more people to enjoy nature in ways that suit their needs.

Parks, such as Rouge National Urban Park and High Park, both in Toronto, offer wide, paved pathways, gentle slopes, and accessible washrooms, creating welcoming spaces for individuals using mobility devices. Trails like the Welland Recreational Canal Trail provide smooth, flat surfaces that make getting out for a walk or roll both easy and enjoyable.

Ontario's beaches are becoming more accessible as well. At Toronto's Woodbine Beach and Wasaga Beach Provincial Park, features such as beach mats (mobi-mats), accessible washrooms, and beach wheelchairs help improve access across sand and shoreline areas.

Whether it's a peaceful stroll along a trail or a day by the water, these spaces offer opportunities to get fresh air, boost mood, and enjoy the many benefits of being outdoors. As spaces in Ontario become increasingly accessible, more people can experience nature in ways that promote independence, inclusion, and overall quality of life.

Accessibility while travelling



CharterAbility Accessible Boat Tours (Oakville)

By Ernie Galloway

CharterAbility is a non-profit organization that provides free, accessible pontoon boat tours for people of all ages and abilities. Operating since 2003, CharterAbility serves several thousands of guests

each year, with up to eight guests per boat tour. Departing from Busby Park, in downtown Oakville, the 40-minute ride on 16-Mile Creek allows guests to experience the local wildlife sanctuary. Thinking about booking a ride? We would love to see your pictures!

For more information, including booking a ride, please visit: charterability.com

VIA Rail Travel and Accessibility

By Maureen Smithers

Summer is the perfect time to travel and with VIA Rail announcing its participation in the 2026 Canada Strong Pass, (those 17 and under travel free and those aged 18 to 24 receive a 25 per cent discount), let's explore what accessibility features are available.

Travellers can access a wide range of supports, including assistance with boarding, seating, and meals. You must contact VIA a minimum of three days prior to travel and/or ensure your VIA travel profile contains your

support needs. A "Request to Travel with a Support Person" form must be submitted if you require a companion to assist with eating, managing medications (including oxygen) and using the washroom.



Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program

By Maureen Smithers

The Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program provides a subtle visual clue: an individual wearing a sunflower lanyard, wrist band or badge, is communicating that they have an invisible disability and may need assistance.

The sunflower symbol signals to trained staff that the wearer may need accommodations or supports such as more time or clearer communication, whether it be for travel, shopping, or accessing services in government or healthcare settings. In Ontario, Toronto Pearson International Airport, Billy Bishop Airport and VIA Rail all participate in the program. Additionally, regional transportation systems in Mississauga and Durham and some grocery stores are part of the global program's growing network. Sunflower lanyards can be obtained for free at participating airports and businesses. For more information, please see: hdsunflower.com/ca

When planning your trip, remember that accessibility varies by location. For example, wheelchair lifts or level boarding platforms may not be available at every stop. Some stations offer curbside support, where staff can escort passengers to the train entrance. Additional features may also include hearing loops for those who use hearing aids and designated relief areas for service animals (which travel at no cost).

All trains are wheelchair accessible and have narrow wheelchairs available onboard, with staff able to assist with transfers. Newer trains have accessible washrooms.

Mouth-watering summer recipes

By Marlene Benedicto

Chicken Lettuce Wraps

Ingredients

- 3 1/2 Tbsp. canola oil, divided
- 7 ounces (approx. 2) shiitake mushrooms, stems removed, and chopped
- Kosher salt and pepper
- 1 1/4 lb. boneless, skinless chicken thighs, trimmed and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
- 1 tsp. grated ginger
- 1/4 cup hoisin sauce
- 1 Tbsp. low-sodium soy sauce
- 1 tsp. rice vinegar
- 1 tsp. sriracha
- 1/2 tsp. toasted sesame oil
- 1 8-ounce can sliced water chestnuts, drained and finely chopped
- 4 scallions, finely chopped, dark green parts reserved for topping
- Toasted sesame seeds, for sprinkling
- 1 small head butter lettuce, leaves separated



Directions

1. Heat 2 tablespoons of canola oil in large skillet on medium-high. Add mushrooms, season with 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper. Cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, 4 to 5 minutes. Transfer to plate.
2. In same skillet, heat remaining 1 1/2 tablespoons canola oil on medium-high. Add chicken in single layer, then season with 1/4 teaspoon each salt and pepper. Cook undisturbed until golden brown, 3 to 4 minutes. Flip the chicken, stir in garlic and ginger, and then cook, flipping once or twice more and gently breaking up chicken, until cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes.
3. Meanwhile, in small bowl, stir together hoisin, soy sauce, vinegar, sriracha, and sesame oil.
4. Add sauce to pan and stir until coated. Remove from heat; fold in water chestnuts, scallions (white and light green parts), and mushrooms, scraping up browned bits. Sprinkle with reserved scallion greens and sesame seeds. Spoon into lettuce leaves and serve immediately.

Summer Rolls

Ingredients

For dipping sauce:

- 1/4 cup lime juice
- 2 Tbsp. mirin
- 2 Tbsp. honey
- 1 to 2 tsp chili garlic sauce

Sweet Basil Filling

- Watermelon
- Cucumber
- Basil



For rolls:

- 1 8 to 10-ounce package rice noodles
- 16 rice paper wrappers

Directions

Make dipping sauce:

In a small bowl, whisk together lime juice, mirin, honey and chili garlic sauce. Set aside for serving.

Make rolls:

Cook rice noodles according to package; prepare one or all the filling options.

To assemble rolls:

1. Fill pie plate or large bowl with warm water. Working quickly with 1 rice paper wrapper at a time, submerge in warm water until pliable, about 20 seconds.
2. Place on cutting board and arrange some rice noodles and desired fillings in center. Fold in wrapper sides to a seal. Starting from bottom, fold base over filling and roll up to seal, being careful not to tear wrapper. Continue rolling to wrap filling completely. Repeat with remaining wrappers and filling.

Aging with a spinal cord injury

By Joan Lewis



After sustaining a T12-L1 spinal cord injury in 1975 when I was 23 years old, I returned to college to study Cartographic Technology. Three years later, I went to Queens University to study Occupational Therapy. I was very fortunate to work at the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health until 2011, when I retired.

I have a very clear memory of one winter day when all my family and friends were skiing on the slopes. I felt overwhelmingly alone and isolated. I needed to find new and interesting things to do. Here are some of the ways I've done that over the last 51 years.

Down the road from my home there was a former Olympic archer who gave lessons. I took up archery, competing at an international level. Once I graduated from university and started working full time in a demanding job, I took up kayaking recreationally. When I started developing neck and shoulder

problems a few years later, I switched to sailing with the Queens Quay Disabled Sailing Program and I really enjoyed sailing and racing for a number of years. After my first shoulder replacement surgery, I switched to a power chair and started utilizing the Direct Funding Program, for which I am extremely grateful, even though it can be a lot of work.

I love to learn and be out in nature, so after retirement, I joined the Toronto Field Naturalists (TFN) who offer about 140 guided walks and lectures per year. I assisted TFN to develop walk descriptions with accessibility information. After the pandemic and with two new, strong shoulders I returned to sailing in 2022, this time at Able Sail Toronto located at the National Yacht Club.

To keep active during the pandemic, a friend and I connected online to follow an exercise program. Meeting

with a friend to exercise kept us both motivated to follow through. We joined a seated yoga class and continued to practice yoga regularly.

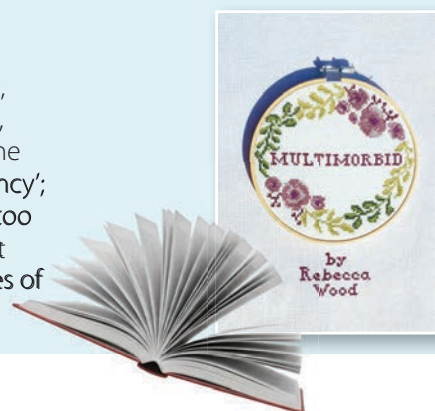
I also practise mindfulness-based stress reduction, a form of meditation that helps to manage the anxiety that comes with always having to adapt. I believe our physical and mental health are intricately related.

Ultimately, I've found it's important to stay connected with others to learn of opportunities to experience engaging activities and people that bring me joy. Over time, as abilities, mobility devices, and opportunities change, so do my activities. Perhaps the very best that any of us can do is to keep changing things up as best we can to keep life interesting while utilizing the supports we need to do just that.

Joan Lewis is a Self-Manager living in Toronto.

Poetry, prose, and clever wordplay

Rebecca Wood's first book was launched in May 2026 by kith books! Through poetry, prose, and clever wordplay, *Multimorbid* details the frustrations of seeking, asking for, and receiving care. *Multimorbid's* often darkly comic take on disability leaves everyone complicit and a little bit scarred – care teams lost in the red tape of their own 'efficiency'; friends and patients alike, trying and failing, and doing their best. And the patient – too patient – advocating, explaining, (self) soothing again. Wood is a peer coordinator at the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto. Hard copies and low-cost digital copies of *Multimorbid* are available for order at RebeccaWoodWrites.ca





Show us your part of the world!

As we plan the 2027 Direct Funding Program Calendar, we are inviting Self-Managers to send your photographs of the areas where you live. Photos should be high resolution with no identifiable people and, where possible, include recognizable landmarks or other geographical features.

Please send photos to ernie.galloway@cilt.ca by September 30, 2026.



New to the newsletter



Maureen Smithers joins *The Self-Manager* newsletter team this issue; she works as Program and Direct Funding Coordinator at the Breaking Down Barriers centre in Collingwood.



The Self-Manager Newsletter Editorial Team:

Marlene Benedicto
Intake and Resource Facilitator

Kate Deacon
Policy Advisor

Ernie Galloway
Agreement and Resource Administrator

Madeline Lamovsek
Senior Community Facilitator

Leanne Larmondin
Communications and Resource Manager

Maureen Smithers
Program and Direct Funding Coordinator,
Breaking Down Barriers

Michael Marek Sparrow
Regional Resource Facilitator

Cathy Tang
Bookkeeping Report Reviewer



Direct Funding Program

Centre for Independent Living in Toronto Inc.

365 Bloor Street East, Suite 902, Toronto, ON M4W 3L4

Tel: 416.599.2458 OR 1.800.354.9950

www.dfontario.ca