

# 2018 Presidents Group Roundtable

In 2018, the Presidents Group advisory committee gathered to share stories of their projects, policies, successes and challenges in inclusive employment strategies.

Creating an Environment that Welcomes Disclosure – Sarah White, Fairware.

Seeing Beyond The Job Description – Chris O’Riley, BC Hydro.

Broadening our Recruitment Strategies – Nicholas Jimenez, ICBC.

Ensuring Inclusion at All Levels of the Organization – Chris Hatton, HSBC Canada.

Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification – Rick Hansen.

## **Creating an Environment that Welcomes Disclosure – Sarah White, Fairware.**

Sarah White talks about how an inclusive culture fosters disclosure.

### Video Transcript:

**(Sarah White)** Hi everyone. I'm not a public speaker, so I'm a little terrified, but I'll be fine. I just want to tell you a little bit about... it sounds like we're a big organization, we're actually a small business. We're about to be fifteen people and I tell you that as a context as being one of the smaller businesses and that we've been around for 13 years.

I've personally been on a journey of being an entrepreneur in a garage and a micromanager and how I've tried to transform my style of leading folks. And to always remember that perfect is the enemy of good.

So, what is this I'm talking about: disclosure. You might be saying, "Sarah, does that mean we have to talk to everybody about their feelings all of the time?" No. That's not entirely what I mean, but we'll get to that.

My first point is that inclusive culture, it touches every part. It's not one thing, it's everything. It's not just the hiring. It's not just the training. It really has to be a part of everything to be successful. And I see disclosure as kind of the litmus test of an inclusive culture. And not all barriers or disabilities are visible and that's partly the perspective that I'm coming from.

So we use a Asana Project Management Tool and this is just one section of our onboarding template that shows how we include diversity, inclusion and our culture and values right from the get go.

So inclusive culture, from my opinion, what is it and what isn't it? It's not simple and it's not easy to unpack in five minutes. It includes all sorts of things like unconscious bias and all of the isms. It has become a buzzword in some ways and it's not always beer and ping pong. It really has to look farther than just that.

It's really more about not having a homogeneous culture and that can be challenging. Just to reinforce, I really think that to have the intention to hire folks with barriers or disabilities, we need to have a workplace in an environment that is welcoming and accepting and that's really what makes it successful.

An inclusive culture to me is one that allows someone to bring their whole self and there's lots of readings and literature on that, really what it means is that you get to show up and be yourself and you don't have to hide parts of yourself.

The business case for diversity, I mean I do without any disrespect, and I get that it's important to show why, but a part of me wants to say, "well what's the business case for doing the right thing?" It should be more than an economic outcome and if it's coming from the intent of, "whoa, I'm gonna make money off disabled people." It's a checklist and it's not a commitment.

People need to see themselves reflected. So, if you look at those stats and we've talked about those, that's one place to start. What is your workplace? Is it 50? Does it represent your demographic of your area in terms of both visible minorities and also disability?

So, fostering disclosure. I like the way you just know I don't want to talk about your feelings. As I said, it's not simple and it might be uncomfortable. I'm not really saying that, yeah, you just essentially have to talk about everybody's feelings all the time. And then the floodgates open and it's

where do we go from there. Floodgates can be closed. Boundaries are critical. I don't see myself as a therapist, but I see myself as a guide.

So, transferring performance. I'll tell a story now about strategies that we've used that have helped and then I would like to tell a story that really demonstrates how I've transformed the way I do things and hopefully have transformed our business.

So, one is for sure as a leader, is to embrace what I look as a self-reflective and responsive management read and learn about unconscious bias and all of the isms. Become a B Corp. Happy to talk to anybody about that, it has really helped us in this journey. Ban disrespect in your organization. Be curious and generous and be in service to your employees.

A colleague of mine said, "I see my employees as my clients." Which for me it means, if my employees are failing, I'm failing. I'm not training, I'm not advising, I'm not helping them in the way they need to. Now I get that that's not always the case and some people have to go and it doesn't work but it's really shifted the way I look at people's behaviour and performance.

We have an employee who was one of our longest term employees and had all of those things: bad behaviour, swearing, critical, negative. So, first I just would be reactive and think like, "oh, that sucks and you're bad, you're not doing your job and your behaviour is bad." And I got to compress this story but it's a journey over some years, but what I came to realize was that I had to stop being reactive, I had to stop being... I had to be curious.

Instead of saying, "you need to do this, this." We did say you need to do these things, but I also said, "and how can I help you get there?" What do I need to do, how can I help you be more aware of your behaviour?" So we figured out little tricks and things and we said, "why don't you go and do a course on personal development, get a business coach."

And then we started having more regular one-on-ones and through that process, eventually, she disclosed to me that she was bipolar. She had never in her entire life, in her entire working experience, ever told anybody and lived with this burden, every day of "I can't tell anybody, I'm always sick." She has the flu but she doesn't.

So through that process, it just turned everything for me. It was like, this is an invisible barrier, a disability that this person didn't feel safe enough to talk about. Does that mean that I became her therapist? No, it just means

that I had this huge understanding of what was going on for her and what she needed to succeed.

And for her, it was a big relief. Then we worked together and decided that we would bring it to our whole team and that we would tell them about it and tell them about her experience. It was a huge thing for the whole team as well. You want to talk about retention. You want to talk about trust.

You know people stay where they want, where they feel heard, where they feel acknowledged, where they feel like they can tell you something that's important about themselves. And they don't tell me everything. I'm not best friends with my employees. I'm friendly, I'm there when they need me.

They tell me stuff when they really need to, but they don't tell me everything. Because I don't want to know everything.

I think just in closing I'd say that everyone has a story, and everyone has a little something and our job is to understand it.

## **Seeing Beyond The Job Description – Chris O’Riley, BC Hydro.**

Chris O’Riley talks about BC Hydro’s Return to Work program as a way of seeing beyond the job description.

### Video Transcript:

(Chris O’Riley) At BC Hydro we have 6,500 employees and they work in office environments as well as in the field. 2/3 of our workforce is unionized. We're considered a high hazard industry and so safety is a really big deal at BC Hydro, and we have a pretty good safety record but unfortunately we have a number of employees who have acquired disabilities over the course of the year, sometimes because of an accident at work sometimes because of something that's happened outside of work and I'm going to talk about this population of people with disabilities in my talk today.

One of the ways that we support these employees is through a recovery service and return to work program. So, we have a recovery team that helps employees who are returning to work from all types of disabilities and that

could be permanent or temporary and it could include a physical ailment or increasingly mental health and addiction issues.

An important thing that we've learned is that it's really important for employees to stay at work and stay connected with the workforce and their colleagues and to continue contributing and if they do that, they come back more quickly and in the greatest capacity possible. We've learned that we need to recognize the importance of the whole person and sometimes you can get caught up in what the person's trade is or their educational background and think of what they can do is based on that or what they've done before and really think more broadly about what they can contribute.

Our program is built around these 3 areas of building a really strong partnership and a network of support for the employee, being flexible as you move through a transition of an employee's recovery and return to work. And then looking beyond this job description that they've been tagged with in the past.

I want to go through a story of an individual, his name is Doug and I'm also using this story with his permission. I've known Doug for many years in the company, he started working at BC Hydro as an electrician, in 1991. He was promoted in 2008 to be a trades training instructor at our technical school. Soon after that, he ran into some performance issues and it became an escalating situation and there was performance management involved, the union gets involved and eventually we get our return to work program involved and he was assessed through that as having an addiction.

We supported him through the program, BC Hydro pays 75% of the cost of those programs and he was able to come back to work in a fully functioning, full capability, including a follow up program with random testing and counseling and monitoring over time. A couple years later he was in a really bad car accident.

It was outside of work, two people in the car were killed and as a result of that accident over the next five years he went through a whole series of operations for his knee and his hip and his shoulder. Obviously, he couldn't do the job that was laid out for him and what he'd been doing previously.

After each surgery we had to come up with a program of modified duties for Doug, to ensure that he could keep contributing to his training role. We were also able to provide partial coverage because there were parts of it including

the field aspect that he wasn't able to do at certain points in this transition, so people filled in behind him.

We were very conscious that such a traumatic and painful series of operations could have derailed his addiction recovery and so we worked closely with the recovery team to keep him connected and maintain his sense of belonging and he was able to carry through his recovery and stay on track with his addiction.

Throughout the process, Doug was always part of the team, and his manager was there. We had an expert in this through our return to work program. The unions involved, that's a really big part of our process and health practitioners were involved to ensure we had the right program in place for Doug given where he was in the transition.

Today I'm really pleased to say that Doug remains a very dedicated employee at BC Hydro and he's got a big job as a trainer and as a safety leader in our organization. In our society I think we have some really strong and freighted even, cultural notions around work and you could even say baggage around work, and you can see this in the phrase 'pulling your weight' or in the question Minister Simpson asked, "What do you do?"

I think both of those concepts would have been difficult for Doug in his time, in his recovery period to respond to. I think we recognized with this return to work program that we're pushing against those notions and I think they go back a long way they're probably rooted in evolutionary biology somewhere in our past but we're pushing back and that's why, because we're pushing back we need a formal and a forceful program even, to ensure these efforts are successful.

Just to summarize and offer some advice, I appreciate this is more challenging in smaller organizations than larger ones, but I think a form of these practices can be applied anywhere.

I think the worst thing any employer can do is sideline an individual who's dealing with a health issue whether it's a physical or increasingly a mental health issue and that sidelining creates the isolation and reinforces the challenge and I think makes the recovery more difficult.

The 3 practices that have been key for us is really building a strong partnership with the network. They're having a network to support the individual going through this very difficult circumstance, really being flexible

in each stage of the transition is different and needs a different set of circumstances and I think it's important to look for opportunities to at times push the employee and challenge them physically and mentally and try and get them as active as we can in the role.

I think looking beyond the job description, I like the quotation about SAP, "Everyone is a talent, so what is it that this person brings that they can contribute in a different way in the organization." Again, getting past the label that's been put on them through their trade, or qualifications, or job descriptions.

Talking about why we do this, I think what I've found is the supporting employees who are going through this kind of challenge just really drives tremendous loyalty and commitment from that person when they get through it. It's a tremendous thing and Doug is a great example of that. I think not just from the employee but from the people around them who care for them and work with them and when they see the organization supporting that person and helping them get back to a place where they're a strong contributor, it's just such a powerful thing.

So, if we're looking for a business case, for me, that's what makes this a really worthwhile investment.

## **Broadening our Recruitment Strategies – Nicholas Jimenez, ICBC.**

Nicholas Jimenez talks about how business leaders can broaden their recruitment strategies.

Video Transcript:

**(Nicolas Jimenez)** I was appointed to the role back in July, so I can't take credit for some of the things I'm going to talk about, but I can certainly take some pride in it because I think it reflects on the kind of organization we're trying to be.

I can also be a little bit critical too because I think we can do more. I think some of what I'm going to talk about, I think the experiences that we've had in the first year in terms of broadening the way we think about recruitment needs to scale up.

We're an organization that's gone through a fairly large expansion of our employee population. In the last 2 to 3 years, we've grown from about 4,800 to 5,500 to accommodate some challenges we're having in our business environment. You might read about them in the paper from time to time. And so, that creates huge pressures on our organization so as we bring people into the organization, people move to other roles.

We can see turnover in certain of those entry level points up to 40 percent in a year. There's a constant churn of people coming in and moving on, so we need to be thinking a little bit more laterally about how we approach recruitment.

That's what I'm going to talk to you a little bit about today. Actually, the credit I want to give isn't to ICBC but it's to the BC Partners in Workforce Innovation as an organization you might have heard of and if you haven't, I'm gonna tell you a little bit about their story on how they've changed the way we think about recruitment. They truly get all the credit.

I'm going to call them BCWIN just because it's a mouthful to use the whole name. So, what this organization does it's funded by the federal and provincial governments and it essentially works to connect employers to people with a broad range of abilities and they do this by working with a partnership or a network of about a 100 other organizations and it is truly amazing what they're able to do so they've helped us in the last year to pilot our broadening of the way we think about recruitment.

We first identify roles where we think we can bring in people with different abilities. We've looked at our call centre, our customer support, back office operations, some of our IT jobs, some of our facility maintenance and some of the vehicle repair and estimation roles that we have.

We've been able, over that time, to again in the first year to hire 7 people with a broad range of abilities, whether that's folks on the autism spectrum, different cognitive abilities, different physical abilities, and people who are living with mental health issues.



More importantly, and I'll talk a little bit about this at the end, we've put our hiring managers and our recruitment managers, about 35 so far, through training to help them think differently about the recruitment process.

So, what do they do? They get involved essentially with an employer. So, we come to them and we say, "look we've got these roles, we need to find candidates" and they essentially do a lot of the work. So, they go out and they work through their network of partner organizations and they find candidates, do the pre-screening interviews and they present us with a shortlist. They essentially cut down the process.

We've actually found that they've improved our hiring cycle times for these roles by about 20% which is significant when you're going through the kind of churn that we're going through in terms of hiring.

Then they help us think about how to structure interviews differently. This is part of the training, so they put our managers through training to understand how to shift and adapt the hiring process. An example would be changing your questions. So, some people have challenges with behaviour based interviews.

A question that you would expect to hear for a customer service role, "tell me about a time when you went above and beyond to provide excellent customer service to a customer." The way to reframe that question for people with different cognitive abilities would be to say, "do you like to work in customer service?" "What is good customer service?"

Very small difference but a huge impact and how people are able to answer the question and how the recruiting manager is able to identify if that's the right person for the role. So that's been a big, big shift for us.

The other thing they do is, once the individual is hired and on-boarded, they provide post-hiring support. They check in with both the managers and the employees, and they make sure that if accommodations are required, the accommodations are there. They also provide coaching for both the new hires, but the managers, to help through that first year.

I can tell you, in particular I've talked to some of the managers who've had to go through training to improve the coaching and performance feedback. There was one employee, in a customer support role who was having productivity issues, and the manager was approaching the conversation

empathetically, with a lot of feeling, a lot of emotion and trying to be very supportive, but that wasn't working for this individual.

What this individual needed with specifics. They needed to know exactly what was going right or wrong and the manager couldn't quite connect why this wasn't working. Well, through the coaching and the training, again very simple subtle shifts, there was a huge change in the conversation and obviously the outcome.

So, I asked the managers who had been involved in this pilot to say, what advice should I give out to this audience? Their advice is really a few things.

One, it is huge for team engagement. So, the teams which these employees are joining are incredibly supportive and they rise to a different level of coaching and support, peer support. Which is something they hadn't expected.

They talk about there being a great fit. So there is a lower turnover for these individuals in these roles and you're getting the right person, for the right type of job.

They talk about the amazing support that BCWIN provides. They also tell me, it's free. Which is something that is amazing. I don't know how long that's going to be the case, but I encourage everyone to do as much as you can to find out more about this organization.

The other thing, and I'll just end on this, is it was the shift in the way people approached the fear. One manager talked about, "I needed to get over the fear of saying or doing the wrong thing." And part of that inclusivity training that BCWIN provides for these recruitment managers, is to basically sensitize people and desensitize and make it a comfortable conversation.

That's the shift that I think has been the most transformative for us. We've only had 35 managers go through this. We've probably got about 300 who are in the hiring roles. So, we've got a way to go but in our first year I think we've made the kind of progress that I know other organizations can make through the support with BCWIN.

## **Ensuring Inclusion at All Levels of the Organization – Chris Hatton, HSBC Canada.**

Chris Hatton speaks about training and awareness and the imperative to ensure inclusion exists at all levels of your organization.

Video Transcript:

**(Chris Hatton)** I feel incredibly fortunate to be here actually and I'd like to thank Craig who, three years ago, came to see me in our office to tell me about the great work that the President's Group was doing and the opportunity to get involved and it was perhaps one of the easiest sells I've ever been part of.

I also feel incredibly fortunate to be a leader for HSBC. A firm that spans the globe, one that genuinely believes that diversity of thought, perspective and experience is part of its DNA. We've worked really hard to have built that and maintain our inclusive and positive performance orientated culture.

I think for a long time in Canada we thought being here - being part of an international organization representing communities and customers across all provinces apart from Prince Edward Island - was enough. But we really do have to work hard to make sure that our reality matches our intentions.

It's really important, I think, that we all as leaders take the time to ensure we stress the importance of learning and information and in creating a culture of inclusivity. That learning that we do and we set out for our colleagues is really important, because to me, what is culture? Culture is a set of shared knowledge, it's a set of skills filtered through a common set of values into the organization.

So, we've done a huge amount in terms of setting out learning for our organization and implemented a good number of training courses. We set out to introduce an open-mindedness; an unconscious bias leadership training for all people leaders in the organization, which has created a really strong awareness and platform for inclusivity.

It's important that executives and senior leaders take personal ownership, stand up and advocate and make sure individuals do recognise the value of it and that is linked to their performance management objectives and scorecards.

We have an employment equity narrative that sets out to the entire organization and our communities what we do, and we deliver accessibility

training to all new employees, all new hires in the organization and all team leaders. That familiarizes staff with how they can access the resources that we have within the organization to acquire accommodations whether they're clients, whether it's clients that need accommodations to deal with our service, whether it's colleagues who need accommodations to perform their duties. And we create partnerships with a range of external vendors and organizations that can help us give insight into those specialist needs to get their skills.

I think the second piece is a framework of policies and expectations in the organization. Our policy and employee guide on workplace accommodations is supported by a central budget and in a large organization we have the ability to do that but taking away the PNL considerations of individual team leaders and managers of putting investment into driving accessibility takes away one of the real big barriers for for-profit centres.

We use interpreting services to support our employee's day to day needs as well as during all of our town halls, all of our abroad employee communications are supported by interpretive sign language that makes it accessible for people with hearing impairment as well as being subtitled. And again, having that sign capability on all of our webcasts and broadcasts across the organization is imperative in raising the profile of the work that we do in this space.

In 2017, we've actually gone a step of investing in some specialized diversity recruiting services so we have people within our HR team who are targeted on reaching out into communities and developing awareness, whether it's people with disabilities, people from different ethnic minorities to bring them into HSBC and using their specialists resources that are targeted at reaching out to those communities and recruiting people into real jobs, into real situations has moved our program forward very significantly.

So, I sat downstairs actually in the hotel room this morning and I thought, "What's the secret sauce? What is the thing that makes the difference between the experiences that go well and the outcomes that deliver and those that don't?" And I kind of brought it down to three things.

First of all, it's about really good listening. It's about creating an environment where we can listen to our communities, where we can listen to a broad range of people and understand the different needs and

accommodations that people have. And we have a network of employee resources groups who provide executives with that opportunity to listen.

So, bringing people from like-minded communities, people with similar challenges together, to engage in a dialogue where executives can listen and understand some of the challenges that they face.

The second thing is attention to detail and it couples very closely with the listening, but if I give you an example of something that we didn't get quite right. One of the things that came from our ability employees resources group was from a visually impaired colleague that said, "You know, it would be great on some of our meeting rooms, if as well as the name of the meeting room that could be printed in Braille."

So, we went off and printed the labels in Braille on all of the meeting room signs that we had in the organization, and I was quite proud that we'd taken that step. Actually, it felt quite good that we'd done that with some of our colleagues. So after we'd done it and completed the program, I went back to the individual and raised it and said, "Have you noticed we've done that? Has it made a difference to you?" He said, "I didn't know you'd done it and no, it hasn't made a difference."

Well, that shocked me a little bit. And the question was, "Why? Why hasn't it worked?" "Well, the thing is Chris, I don't know where the signs on the wall actually are. So, the fact that there's Braille on them is of no use to me whatsoever." So, thinking about that detail and the practical application of how it goes and looping that back into the listening, so you have the right conversation to understand the right problem to really address is super important.

Then the last thing, which is a big one for me and as a somewhat stiff lipped, middle-aged banker, it's a tough one to talk about actually and it is, of course, the F-word and it's that word "feelings." I do think it is important that, as leaders, we have the courage to step into people's feelings and not just the feelings of people that come into the organization with particularly different ability challenges or particularly different visible minority statuses.

It's about the feelings of the people in the teams that they are going to join. One of the most successful experiences we had is with a colleague who is hearing impaired. And one of my leaders in my organization did have the courage to step into the feelings with the team that the individual was going

to join and ask them: how were they feeling about it? And of course, they were all really excited to have a new colleague; they all recognized it was the right thing to do and felt good that we were welcoming a colleague with some ability challenges into the organization.

But they are also quite terrified on a number of things about how are they going to communicate with that individual. How is it going to work in terms of the operating practices day to day? And, by the leader stepping up and have the courage to talk about those feelings, to address some of those things, to provide support to those individuals for their access to the information, the knowledge, the skills, the mindset that they needed to be successful and welcome that colleague into the organization. It was incredibly powerful.

And what I observed around the office from that conversation was the number of people who, off their own back, went out and learned sign language capabilities so they could communicate with their new colleague. It was an incredibly humbling experience and it did just reveal to me the power of the F-word. Feelings are important in this.

## **Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification – Rick Hansen.**

Rick Hansen talks about the evolution of accessibility and the Rick Hansen Foundation Accessibility Certification Program.

### Video Transcript:

**(Rick Hansen)** It's interesting how things have evolved. I remember, back on the original Man of Motion tour, the issue of accessibility and inclusion for people with disabilities was largely considered a charitable concern.

And then the evolution, over all these years, is clearly refined and elevated to be firmly embedded - as you heard from Minister Simpson and Minister Qualtrough - a human rights concern. And to imbedding the laws of our country there are constitutional statements and objectives and then drop

them down systematically below that into practical implementation integrity and credibility against the metrics and the results of moving towards a truly accessible and inclusive country.

It's easy to talk about it and sometimes you need to put the words in but in reality the real litmus test is: how are we doing? And trying to make those metrics objective and to stand behind them and recognize that no one's perfect, we're all on the journey and we just need to try to get there faster. That's why this event is so important.

If I think about where we're at today we're moving way past just the charitable and human rights initiatives to think of the economic and cultural imperative. It's urgent for us to be a healthy, sustainable culture and society. If we have all those pillars driving forward and there are no black and white maxims or ideology to limit or exclude people from the way they approach this solution, we can power and get there faster.

And the world has changed rapidly, there's over 1 billion people on the planet today living with a disability according to the World Health Organization. It's the world's largest minority and yet, there's interesting things, you know, trends are moving way past that because aging boomers are bringing their disabling conditions into this number and it's going to be one in five Canadians by 2036.

It'll affect everyone. It won't be just the marginal things. It won't also just be the stereotypical things we see in our symbols today. If you think of the one thing that represents in our symbolic examples of accessibility, what is that symbol? The traditional stickman in a wheelchair. Wow, that's really interesting.

We've heard today, and of course we all know disability is visible and not so visible. It affects all of us in different ways. And so, we have to reframe that symbol and also address some of the systemic barriers that are real in order for us to really understand how to make change because without understanding that we go forward with at our own peril because we don't really understand resistance and challenges inside individuals, inside organizations and in society.

When we look at today's world, disability isn't hitting at or above its weight. The magnitude of this whole field is because everyone seems to have it being fragmented and oriented by the individual personal experience; the



medical diagnosis of disease or clinical diagnosis of the kind of disability or the state that the person is in, in their own personal journey.

Yet, when you bring that magnified community together on common barriers that we all face then we could actually drive and accelerate and break through. The first is to make sure that we understand disability is a big deal and it affects everyone.

We also have to recognize that attitudes need to move from being negative, stereotypic to being positive, normalized and enabled and really, reference them only when they're relevant and then mostly focus on the barriers so we can liberate ability and potential. That really shifts all of our perspective.

Then lastly is accessibility. Accessibility is really critical because if we can speak about awareness and attitudes and ideology, but if people can't get to the places they live, work, play and learn then nothing really counts. And so, one of the things about making sure that employment is really maximized and we're talking about employment but one of the major pillars of that is really recognizing that our built environment is absolutely fundamental to being able to be fully functional and to be able to actually see some of the examples of how our built environment just holds us back.

Taking a look at this actual building here that really thinks that their innovative solution towards a built environment is to put a ramp in. Right? Who would ever use that? Or, "Well, we won't build a ramp, we'll just deal with the stairs and we'll create some innovative solutions." Or, when we're in the parking lot in a northern community, we'll put a handicapped spot... that old signal. But of course, to the right there somebody wants to put the snow somewhere and they're not thinking inclusively.

Sometimes the broader of systemic barriers are more important than the tangible physical and barriers. That's why it's important to look at an entire built environment in its whole. Our organization, The Rick Hansen Foundation, has committed to hiring people with disabilities and we're proud that we're hiring, and we have over 30% of our workforce with people with disabilities.

We've made our work environment accessible but we're part of a bigger building and interestingly enough, that building isn't owned by us and it's a big institution. What happened is, when it was built, they actually didn't really think about the customer service and that there was no parking spot



for them and so what they did is, they actually all moved into the suite of wheelchair parking spots. So, constantly those spots were completely jammed and not accessible because it wasn't thought of in a holistic and universal way.

So, designing a solution for fragmented views of what accessibility is, is absolutely critical; making it not just a subjective individual experience but a unified professional experience, the qualified experience, where people can be trained and accredited and it isn't just the perspective a person with a disability it's actually normalized through the design community.

Everybody who touches a building becomes responsible for learning and knowing that their building is built and/or could be retrofitted as being accessible and inclusive. That's been done in other sectors. The Leeds world was established as a result of energy efficiency and wanting to have buildings built right but we forgot people and we have to catch up to that.

We've decided to create an accreditation and certification program in accessibility. We have an amazing group of experts led by Brad McCannell, one of the world's experts in universal and inclusive design and he's here and I'd like to recognize Brad. Brad has been in his business for over 30 years. But Brad is one person, and we knew that we had to scale this and transform it and normalize it and we needed a committee of experts from the built environment and the chair of our committee who drives this organization and development is Stanis Smith.

Stanis is with Stantec and I want to recognize Stanis because Stantec is an engineering architectural firm who actually comes in and works in the real world. To have Stanis represent that next generation of professionals actually adopting this and leading as a normalised process is huge.

What that does is, it allows us to actually create a certification process when people have been rated and then recognized for where they are. Are they at a minimal level or do they not qualify against even the minimal laws and standards? Or at a gold level where innovation drives the creativity and the result? And is it actually relevant to how the building functions?

We want to be able to create objective, meaningful scorecards where anything below 60% isn't qualified. Anything 60% to 80% is accessibility certified and then anything above is gold. And we're not putting boundaries

around that because we want to make sure that today's standards don't become tomorrow's handicaps and innovation will continue to drive forward.

And it's a handoff product it can be used right away, not for tomorrow, not for four years down the road when legislation comes forward and actually creates yet again, new standards and new processes. People want to act now. They want comfort and security that they actually have the right thing to do but they're not perfect and they can keep going after they actually have been assessed as well because it's a journey not a destination.

And in BC, thanks to the government of British Columbia we've actually had an incredible start-up grant to be able to make this happen, a made in BC national and global solution. And we've already had over 237 in the last dashboard and it's now I've been told today it is over 300 people and organizations have been rated and assessed.

300 different organizations behind those building ratings and of course, we see this as moving forward rapidly and it's not just about the rating and then the ability for you to speak to your employees and your customers about where you are, it's also about us to be able to think about being able to help you to move forward with practical recommendations that are well thought out common sense.

It also prevents the burden to come up with these solutions or the ability to recognize there are financial challenges and that's why we're also pleased to be able to offer accessibility grants once you've been rated. So, that if there's recommendations to upgrade, to get to the certification level or to even go beyond, well then you can apply, and we have up to 4 million dollars of grants. And already, there's 47 applicants have been in play already.

We have two more grant cycles over the course of the next fiscal year. There'll be 200 projects all together throughout British Columbia and we have some really cool examples of how an organization, the Surrey Art Centre, has received a gold designation in their certification but they've actually applied for a grant and they've been upgraded based on recommendations because remember it's 80% and above.

And they've actually got improvements to have new accessible washrooms in their facility for everyone. So, it's an upgrading process and we want to be able to make sure that that scale up grant isn't the end, it's the beginning of every building and every organization in British Columbia. And every

province across the country and eventually every country in the world, is using a unified and global standard that's made here in British Columbia.

We're super proud of being able to actually now extend into other universities and colleges in other provinces in Vancouver, Calgary, Ottawa, Toronto and Halifax throughout this year. We actually have a federal proposal to help the federal government interpret complex legislation and have a practical hand off tool for private sector and communities and government to all work together and to unify their jurisdictional authority with common platforms and common sense to make things happen right away.

Ultimately, we want to celebrate success. And so, as we build a whole new normal view of what accessibility is and get into our accessibility certification program, take advantage of the expertise that's taking place and be a champion and a leader in your industry, not just in your organization.

And lastly, I want to recognize that the world is a lot smaller than it was when I wheeled around the world, and the only way that we can actually make an inclusive world is to build bridges to inclusivity. This certification program is truly a tangible bridge where we standardize language with standardized metrics and we push out the ability for everyone to participate and make it relevant to all.

I want to thank you for giving me the privilege to speak to you and I hope that you'll join in this movement, this made in BC national and global movement. The journey that's been going on for over 30 years. And we'll get there faster with an exciting program, like our accessibility certification program.