



THE ITA WEGMAN ASSOCIATION OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

*For Curative Education
And Social Therapy*

4766 Waters Road
Duncan, BC V9L 6S9

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April 23, 2024

Dear Mr. Jim Wakeham and CVRD board;

We are drawing to your attention and requesting assistance in resolving a longstanding issue with the handyDART service capabilities in supporting our Companions (individuals with diverse disabilities) at The Ita Wegman Association of BC, a non-profit society which, since 1995, has operated the Glenora Farm Community in Duncan. The farm is currently home to eighteen disabled BC citizens and their caregivers and they are joined for day programs each week by three additional Cowichan Valley residents.

While this may appear an insignificant issue to transit for a non-profit with limited resources and those we support it is anything but. As it not only causes financial and staffing strain on our organization but also limits those, we support that could independently attend appointments in Duncan giving them the autonomy that any individual has a right to have.

The situation we refer to is as follows:

In 2016 the CVRD adopted a policy that limited the boundary for handyDART Services to those living within 1.5 km of a regular transit route. All of our 18 disabled residents are *qualified and registered* to receive handyDART service, but Glenora Farm is outside the boundary and thus is not serviced. We have been now working with CVRD directly in attempt to resolve this issue since late 2023.

However, for an example during the season of Special Olympics Bowling practices each Tuesday the three aforementioned Duncan residents who attend day programs at Glenora Farm are dropped off and picked up, *at the farm, by handyDART*, to take them to Special Olympics Bowling at the local bowling alley. These residents live within the handyDART boundary so were 'grandfathered in' to receive handyDART service even though they attend a day program outside the boundary.

Five 'qualified and registered' disabled residents who live at Glenora Farm attend the same Special Olympics bowling program, **at the same time and at the same place**, but are not allowed to ride on the HandyDart bus because the farm is "outside the boundary".

Thus the near empty bus leaves and day program workers are left to find available personnel to drive behind the HandyDart bus to the same location.

How does this make any sense to anyone? This is just one example of the frustration of driving behind the Handydart. This obviously is a financial and scheduling strain on our organization and making our individuals that we drive feel like "*children*" because they don't have access to the bus and their independence.

Costs for Duncan handyDART Services are shared between the Province and the CVRD and we are aware that current funding does not allow expansion of the handyDART service area. In a rural area like Duncan the need for increased transit services for disabled citizens is clearly urgent, but many solutions actual in fact due not require extra finances just clear communication and collaboration with Glenora Farm and handyDart service.

The bigger picture barrier is that although we have the capacity to grow and support more individuals in our day programs that are all ready in place at Glenora Farm, and those who wish to attend are not able to access our programs because the transportation to our location is a barrier for most families in our district. Instead of 'grandfathering in' individuals it makes much more sense that the day program be 'grandfathered in' since the bus now travels there anyway. This would allow for future day program attendees to use the handyDART service already in place, these Community Inclusion programs are an



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important resource to many individuals and their families, promoting skill building, supporting the broader community by way of food donations to a variety of food insecurity programs within the Cowichan Valley region, from our 3-acre garden, being able to connect with the Cowichan Tribes by providing space to cure store logs at our farm for future ceremonial use. We are active in our community and make it a priority to have our Companions be part of their Cowichan Valley Community but how can we fully do so if we restrict their access to public transportation.

What it will require is willingness and commitment on the part of transit 'decision makers' to resolve this. Non-profit societies such as ours stay afloat through the tireless commitment of families, coworkers and so many others but support for our most vulnerable citizens needs to be a priority for government agencies.

A willingness to 'think outside the box' on the part of transit officials could well solve this situation enabling these people to ride on the bus with their peers.

This situation seems a prime example of the old adage, '*where there is a will, there is a way*'; all the necessary paper work has long ago been completed and the obvious questions answered, ie bus capacity etc. It defies all logic that the status quo has gone on for so long. We are committed to solving this and we need your help.

Thank you for taking the time to consider our request.

Dominica Dorazio, Facility Manager

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