

# Faces of the Future

*New Directions at the Garth Homer Society*

# Message from the Chair



## Leading through Change

The Garth Homer Society (GHS) is entering a period of transformation, embarking on changes and growth that will reshape our services in the years ahead. This work is imperative. The world around us is changing and, to do the best we can for the people we serve, we must change as well.

Like so many other community-based service providers, GHS got its start with the initiative of families. In 1960, Phyllis Sutton formed the Arbutus Arts and Craft Society to meet the needs of her two developmentally disabled adult children and their friends. In 1968, at the urging of Garth Homer, the executive director of the Community Social Planning Council of Greater Victoria, Arbutus Arts and Crafts joined with other family-driven groups to develop an activity centre for adults with disabilities.

Garth passed away in 1976, and the centre named in his honour opened in 1977 as the home for the organization that emerged from the collaboration of

smaller agencies – the Garth Homer Society. The Garth Homer Centre was originally built to house sheltered workshops for crafts, woodworking, chair caning, and mail processing. It was a state-of-the-art facility when it opened, and a vibrant expression of the vision of the Society's founders.

Over the years, the expectations of clients and their families changed. The last of the workshops closed in the 1990s, to be replaced by community inclusion and employment services. Today, GHS serves more than 175 clients in seven different community-focused day and employment programs. The centre has been transformed into a busy community hub, where clients come and go all day long, to and from their community-based activities.

But the world has not stood still. For the first time in human history, a whole generation of adults with developmental disabilities is living into old age, creating demands for innovation in service that we have not

experienced before. Among our younger clients, autism is rapidly replacing Down syndrome as the most common disability. More and more, we are being asked to serve people with multiple and more acute disabilities, and the families of younger clients are expecting much higher levels of service and inclusion, even as funding fails to keep pace with growing demand.

These challenges can only be met with innovative strategies, services, and facilities. GHS is determined to honour the vision of its founders by leading change in the complex years ahead.

After 35 years, GHS remains a work in progress, which is as it should be for any organization that puts the interests of its clients first. This report, *Faces of the Future*, provides an overview of some of the changes

now beginning to unfold. For all of you who have contributed to GHS over the years — staff, volunteers, family members, caregivers, donors, funders, and, of course, clients — the Board extends its thanks to you for bringing us to where we stand today and for making a new future possible. We cannot say precisely how things may develop, but we will keep you posted and can assure you that, as ever, the Garth Homer Society will continue to strive to help those we serve to make for themselves a life, a home, and a place in the world.

Chair, Garth Homer Society

**... the Garth Homer Society will continue to strive to help those we serve to make for themselves a life, a home, and a place in the world.**

# Faces of the Future

Once we called it mental retardation, now we call it developmental disability. Labels come and labels go, but always they hide more than they reveal. The challenge in delivering services is not just to address the disability, but to nurture the individual capability that thrives behind the label.

At GHS, our clients display an astounding range of capabilities. Some get up and go to work each day. Others have taught themselves to read and type in our Computer Resource Centre. In our Artworks program, participants produce works of astonishing emotional and visual depth.

For others, a good day is one on which they can take on a simple task and see it done or simply experience a day without crushing anxiety.

Whatever their abilities, our clients share one thing — hopes for the future and a place in the

world. We cannot see that future through their eyes, but we can certainly see it in their faces.



# Four Things That Matter



Organizations face two kinds of change.

The first is “incremental” change — the small ongoing improvements to business-as-usual that comprise the bulk of our year-to-year planning. Incremental change is a constant in the best organizations; the steady effort to improve, driven from within by good management, attentive boards and engaged stakeholders.

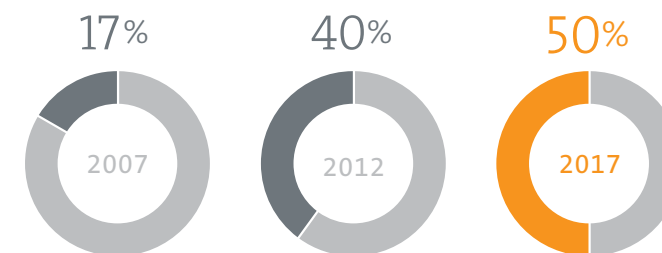
The second is “transformational” change — foundational shifts in the ways we deliver

the mission and services. Most often, transformational change is driven by changes in the environment that force organizations to either adapt strategically, or slowly become irrelevant and unsustainable.

At GHS, we believe that four key environmental challenges will drive the transformational changes of our future.

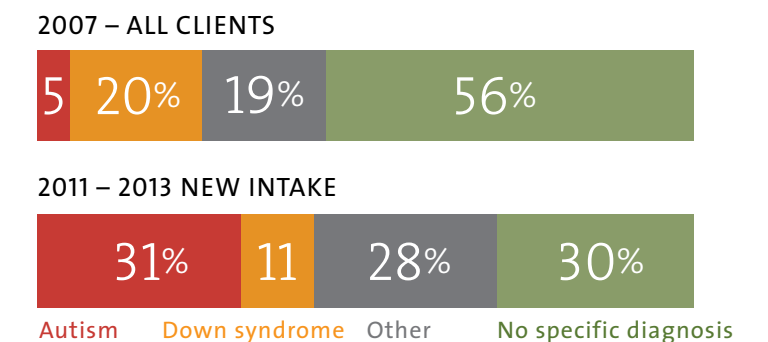
**1 Our clients are aging**  
 In the 1920s, the life expectancy of a child born with Down syndrome was nine years. Today, people with Down syndrome have a life expectancy of 54 years, and those with less severe disabilities are living nearly as long as the rest of us. For the first time, a whole generation of people with developmental disabilities is living into old age. Currently, of the 32 GHS clients in Pathways, our programs for older clients, half have dementia. We believe that by 2017 nearly 50% of our clients will be aged 50 and over.

PERCENTAGE OF OLDER CLIENTS AT GHS OVER TIME



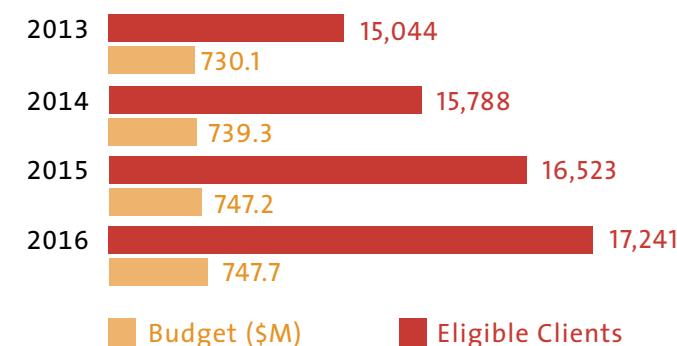
**2 Disability is changing**  
 In 2007, 20% of our clients had a primary diagnosis of Down syndrome, 5% had a primary diagnosis of autism, and 56% had no specific diagnosis. But from 2011 to 2013, 31% of our new clients had a primary diagnosis of autism, 11% had a primary diagnosis of Down syndrome, and 30% had no specific diagnosis. At the same time, our intake has become increasingly focused on high-needs clients.

PRIMARY DIAGNOSIS OF GHS CLIENTS



**3 Funding is shrinking**  
 According to statistics from Community Living British Columbia (CLBC), demand for services is increasing by 5% each year. At the same time, funding has remained flat, meaning that funding is shrinking relative to demand. For every person and family that needs support, there is simply less money than there used to be. We do not see the fiscal situation changing any time soon.

CLBC GROWTH 2013-16



**4 Expectations are rising**  
 Increasingly, young people with developmental disabilities will not accept a life of isolation and separation. They and their families want greater inclusion, more individual opportunity, and services specifically geared to support individual needs and aspirations. For older clients, there is an expectation that they will be able to age with dignity and choice, safely and securely among their friends and support networks, and with continued access to supports specific to their disability.



# Our Changing Services

Our goal at GHS is to provide a life-long continuum of support — to meet changing needs at every stage of life. As well as providing support for those clients reaching old age, we will be serving a rapidly changing group of younger clients with different disabilities and expectations.

The number of older people we support is growing fast, and is going to keep growing. This presents a dilemma. If we simply let our services for older clients grow organically, then eventually our other services will shrink to where they are no longer sustainable. At that point, there would be no possibility of a life-long continuum of support.

This means we must foster moderate growth in each service to maintain sustainability across all our programs. More importantly, we must maintain a diverse, flexible portfolio of services that meets the needs of our clients at every stage of life, and must be able to support people through often difficult, and sometimes rapid, life transitions.



## In the future, all our programs will be organized into three service divisions.

**1 Geriatrics**  
GHS will be a leader in the development of services for older adults with developmental disabilities. These will include both day services and residential care. We anticipate that over the coming decade about 50% of our older clients will develop dementia. For those clients, we plan to build fully inclusive community-based programs that serve both those with and without disabilities.

**2 LifeStreams Learning**  
For younger clients with moderate needs, LifeStreams Learning (LSL) will provide comprehensive, curriculum-based, post-secondary learning and personal development, to maximize their potential for both employment and inclusion. LSL will integrate existing GHS day programs with employment, volunteer engagement, arts learning, and digital learning using a learning model based on the assessment of individual needs and individual learning plans. We anticipate that learners will participate in LSL for an average of three to five years on a part-time basis before moving on to employment or community inclusion programs.

**3 High Needs Community Inclusion and Social Life Skills**  
Looking forward, we will focus our existing community inclusion programs on clients with higher needs, such as those with multiple or more complex disabilities, and their attendant health problems. Our community inclusion services will aim to break down program silos so that each client engages with a broader circle of friends, participates in a much wider range of activities, and can choose from a wide range of activities within their individual support plans.

For all our programs and services, the common denominator will be a commitment to maximize the opportunities and capacities of our clients for community inclusion, with a focus on rigorous individual assessments as the basis for services tightly geared to the specific needs, abilities, and preferences of each client.

# Our Redevelopment Vision

## The future of GHS is intimately tied to the future of the Garth Homer Centre.

Just as services can lose relevance over time, a facility can become less suitable for the activities it houses.

In 2012, with support from the Garth Homer Foundation and the United Way, we undertook an assessment of the Garth Homer Centre. It was gratifying to learn that after more than 35 years of intense, daily use and many alterations, our facility remains fundamentally sound.

At the same time, we confirmed that the centre is no longer well configured to house our current services, or those we need to offer in the future. There is more to redevelopment than simply creating engaging program spaces. The way we use our facility is key to our future financial sustainability. The Garth Homer Society cannot be sustainable unless we use our facility efficiently and effectively.

It follows that the future of GHS is intimately tied to the future of the centre. Our belief is that innovative facilities not only provide a space for service delivery, but that they can contribute directly through their design and configuration to the progress and well-being of those we serve. With this as our motivating tenet, we have embarked on a long-term redevelopment vision for the Garth Homer Centre and site.



## The vision is in three parts.

**First**, we hope to undertake an expansion, reorganization, and modernization of our program spaces, with a special emphasis on enhancing the facility for the support of those with dementia and other health issues related to aging, and for those with higher physical and behavioural support needs.

**Second**, we will build highly innovative, supportive cluster housing for older adults in a new building on our site. The housing will be integrated with a neighbourhood-based day services centre for adults with dementia. The dementia centre will serve both those with and without disabilities.

With these first two steps our aim is to offer three critical services for developmental disabilities in the same location — high needs and geriatric day services, residential supports for older adults, and dementia day services. We want to comprehensively address a client’s needs on-site so that rapid geriatric transitions do not threaten the social supports and continuity of services for our older clients.

**Finally**, we see the redevelopment of the Garth Homer Centre as a first step in the redevelopment of the community-purpose lands which surround us. GHS is located within a unique mix of other not-for-profit societies that provide a range of services and housing for families, seniors, and people with special needs. The site represents a unique opportunity in Victoria for the development

of a collaborative “campus of care,” fully integrated into the surrounding commercial and residential neighbourhood, and serving diverse populations in a uniquely inclusive and accessible built environment. Our aim is to provide leadership for the development of this inclusive, accessible neighbourhood.



# Special Thanks: Our Funders



GHS is uniquely fortunate to have funders who are tremendously understanding of our transformational agenda, and consistently willing to get behind a new idea when they are convinced it can make a real difference.

They have, in short, been true collaborators. For this, and for the support we are sure they will continue to extend in the future, we gratefully acknowledge them.

**The success of GHS programs and services relies on the continuing support of our funders and donors.**

## Thanks To Our Community Funders

Community funders are the angel investors of the social world, investing scarce resources to improve communities. The following have made an enormous difference to GHS, more than they might imagine.

- The **United Way of Greater Victoria**, with support for facility assessment, and multi-year funding for geriatrics development.
- The **Victoria Foundation**, with its bold support for the development of a learning needs assessment tool.
- The **Vancouver Foundation**, for funding that allowed expansion of our High School Transition Project to Saanich high schools.
- The **Telus Victoria Community Board**, for funding the Oak Bay High School Transition Project and for LifeStreams Learning.
- The **Coast Capital Community Investment Fund**, for funding the Oak Bay High School Transition Project and for LifeStreams Learning.
- The **Gaming Branch of the Ministry of Public Safety and Solicitor General**, for its major grant in support of our Computer Resource Centre.
- The **Knights of Pythias** for their support of the Computer Resource Centre.
- **IBM** for its Corporate Citizenship Grants to support our acquisition of iPads.
- The **Vancity Community Foundation** and the **Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation** for their grants, through the Garth Homer Foundation, to support the early stages of our facility redevelopment planning.

## Thanks To Community Living British Columbia

CLBC is the agency that funds our services. It is responsible for most of our budget. CLBC staff, both locally and provincially, have always looked beyond the current contracts and are supportive of many of our new initiatives. They have found ways within our normal contract and administrative processes to help facilitate some of our new projects, especially in facility redevelopment, geriatrics expansion, and the expansion of our services for higher needs clients. We look forward to working closely with CLBC in the future as our wider plans continue to unfold.

## Thank You To Our Individual Donors And To The Garth Homer Foundation

GHS enjoys the sustained support of a small but committed group of individual donors who make generous contributions to our work with legacy gifts, through our annual campaign, in special events, and in response to special appeals. Without their ongoing support, much of what we do would not be possible.

The Garth Homer Foundation conducts individual fundraising on behalf of GHS. The endowment it has built helps to stabilize GHS operations, provides funding for special projects and is a source of matching funds for community grants. The Foundation also owns the Garth Homer Centre, and is closely involved in our efforts at capital redevelopment. We deeply appreciate the committed role the Foundation plays in sustaining and advancing our work.

A Life,

A Home,

And A Place In The World

Times and issues may change, but fundamentally, people with developmental disabilities want what they always have wanted — to be accepted among friends and to have a daily purpose.

In short, they want no more or no less than the rest of us — a place in the world.

After nearly four decades, GHS continues its commitment to help those we serve to find their place and make lives for themselves, on their own terms and in their own ways. Despite current difficult times, we look to our future with renewed energy, careful optimism, and a strong sense of possibility. We hope this report gives you an idea, not only of our direction and strategy, but also of our hopes.

Looking back, it is evident that the sources of our optimism and hope, and of our conviction that we must and can do more, are inextricably linked with the people whose lives run through our story.

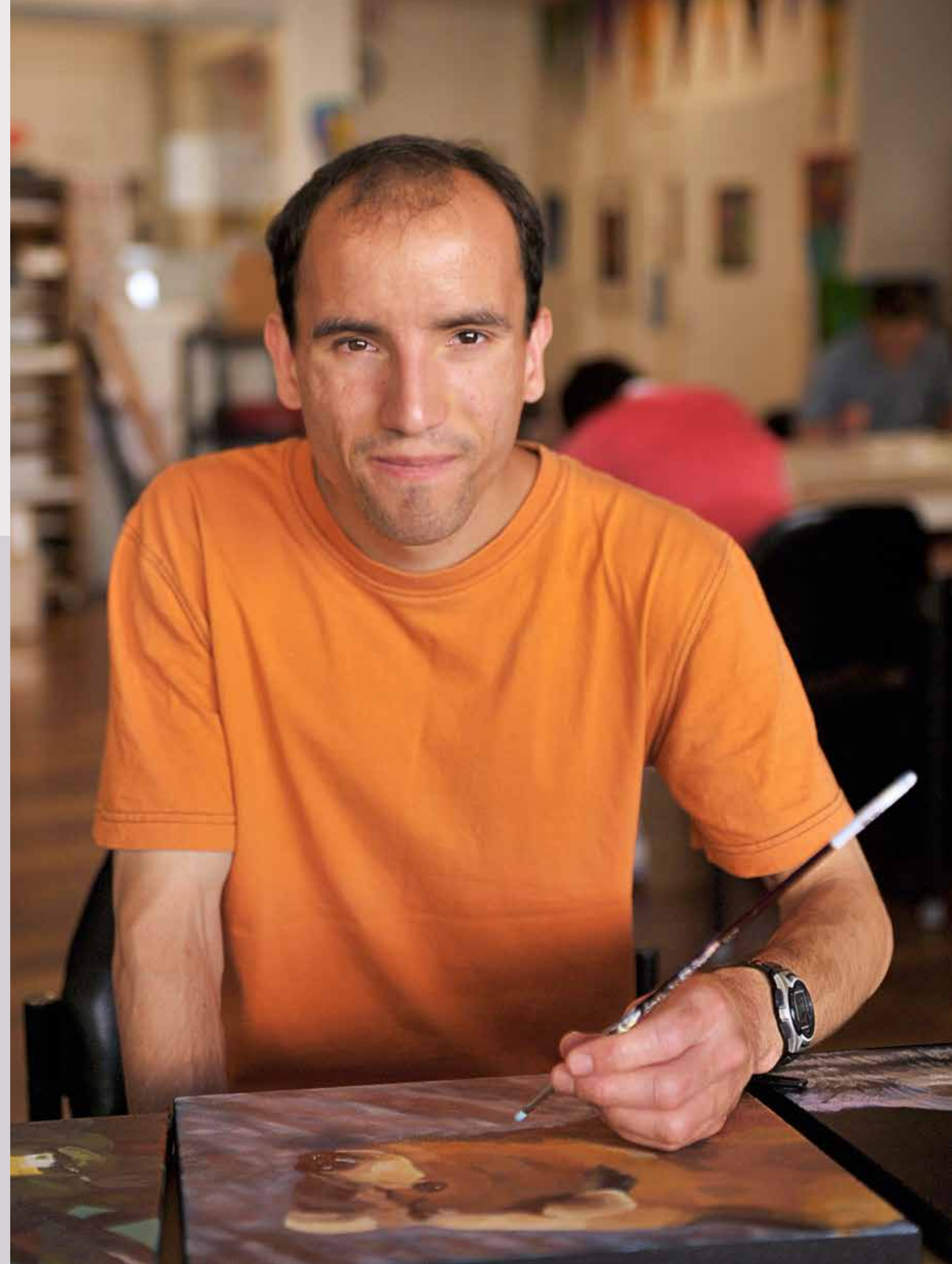
First among these is Garth Homer, whose vision led to the creation of GHS and the building of the Garth Homer Centre. What he accomplished

nearly forty years ago created both the physical foundation and the organizational scale that allow us today to realistically contemplate exciting innovations for our future.

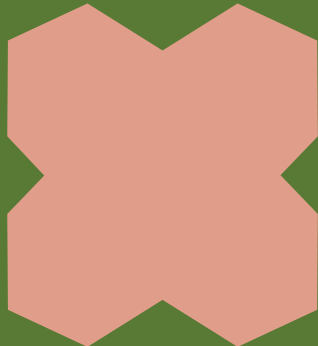
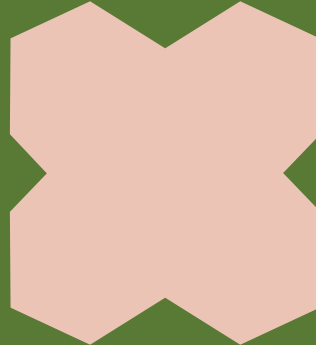
Second, are our clients. It is true to say that we doubtless get more from them than they get from us. In the shared laughter and sadness, and in the quiet, unassuming strength that propels their daily lives, we find the inspiration and energy to push forward.

And finally, we must look to our staff, to all those who have worked with us on the front lines over the years. They are as diverse a group of people as you are ever likely to find, but they all share one remarkable trait – an uncanny ability to see past the mask of disability to the person behind and to say “Hello” with genuine interest and friendship.

That is no small thing. For from that “Hello” everything else follows.







## A Life, A Home, And A Place In The World

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