**Alison Whiting:** Welcome back everyone. We will be starting the next session shortly. Just a reminder, information about how to submit questions and how to access French captions can be found in the chat. Our first speaker this hour is Mary Salvani. Mary was an ambassador for the Alberta Park's Push to Open Program and is passionate about educating others about the importance of access for all to parks and nature. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Arts in Social Justice and Catholic Studies at St. Mary University in Calgary, Alberta. Welcome Mary.

**Mary Salvani:** Hello everyone. My name is Mary Salvani. I was born with Dyspraxia. It is a disability that affects me in many ways, including vision, and mobility. I love being in parks. I also love helping people access parks. I used to be an ambassador with Alberta Park's Inclusion Program, Push to Open. My job with Push to Open was to educate people about the fact that people with disabilities do belong outside. Oftentimes I would ask questions that make people think such as do you think people with disability disabilities can go up mountains or must they always walk and roll their wheelchairs flat on the ground? Do you think people with balance issues and vision loss can do things like kayaking safely? These are the questions I often asked when I was trying to challenge people's beliefs and thoughts about what people with disabilities can and cannot do. Next slide. That's the next one after that.

One of the biggest barriers to accessing parks in general is a lack of affordable accessible transportation. In Calgary, we have a paratransit shared ride door-to-door program called Calgary Transit Access. With my bus pass, I can book a ride on ride to red arrow's downtown office. Unfortunately for reasons I don't understand, CTA does not accept the Canadian National Institute for the Blind membership card as as a form of payment. For those with disabilities who prefer to use Calgary transit they can use the bus or C train to get around to their destination using their bus pass or ticket. The buses and trains vehicles are deemed to be accessible for those with vision loss they can use the Canadian National Institute for the Blind membership card to ride regular transit services.

On it regional transit provides rides from Calgary to Banff and Canmore. To make sure that the bus they're using is wheelchair accessible, they require riders to call ahead of time a booking to request a wheelchair accessible bus. The cost to ride on it is one dollar one way, twenty dollars round trip. In addition to riding on it riders with an honor ticket can use that ticket to ride in Canmore and Banff local bus service, ROAM to their destination within Banff National Park. all of ROAM's transit buses are one hundred percent wheelchair accessible. For people with vision loss, ROAM's buses do tell the riders what stop they are going to be at and what the next stop automatically is. And next slide. Okay next slide to that one. Yep.

Another barrier people with disabilities face is a is a lack of affordable and accessible places to stay at. I don't know of any hostel, hotel, motel in Banff that is that is totally wheelchair accessible. I do know that there's a place in Canmore called the Canmore Rotary House. It is a corner that unit that sleeps up to seven people. The Canmore Rotary House is co-owned by the Calgary Scope Society. The Calgary Scope Society specializes in working with people who have developmental disabilities throughout their lifespan. They renovated the condo unit to be 100 percent accessible for people with a variety of disabilities. If I'm doing a multi-day trip to the mountain, I usually stay at the Canmore Rotary House when I'm going to Banff. Some days I stay there with my family and friends and sometimes and sometimes I stay with friends. It's at least two blocks away from where the on it bus stops and picks up people in Canmore. From there I can usually take the on it bus to Banff. Next slide.

The third issue people with disabilities face is that not all trails are designed to be accessible. When the trail can't be made accessible I often say adapt the user so that they can use the trail safely. In the photo you can see my friends and I on a very narrow bridge that is over top of a small creek. I am sitting in a one-wheel all-terrain wheelchair called a park explorer. I have a friend in the front pulling it and another friend pushing and balancing it behind me. Shortly after this picture was taken, the bridge broke. Everyone on top on the trip is used to operating the wheelchair safely throughout the Canadian Rockies. The those who came from Community Resource Initiative Society, CRIS Kelowna, take people with disabilities every day into BC's Rocky Mountains. We decided together that with the friend who is holding the wheelchair at the back would do a fireman's throw and his wife would catch me on the other side. We didn't change our route or our plans at all. We went up the top of the mountain. On the way down the wheelchair break broke but despite those things I still felt safe with everyone. We did not pave the trail or flatten it. We adapted ourselves so that we could go hiking together. Everyone had a role to play. My my job was to make sure the line of communication was open between all of us and to remind my friends to remain hydrated. Next slide.

As you can see in the video I am going down the steep set of stairs. We were using, we were using on the Canadian Mount Everest Trail. It is short and steep hike to go to the peak. Someone is holding my trailer at the back directing the person in the front to get down to the parking lot safely. The wheelchair was designed by former Mayor of Vancouver after he became disabled. It has been up a lot of trails with people with disabilities in the Canadian Rockies, Mount Kilimanjaro in Nepal, and Mount Everest. Please play the video. Luckily I don't have motion sickness. Luckily I don't have motion sickness.

Okay. When people with disabilities have the support they want and need they can do anything from hiking to kayaking and skiing. There are organizations such as CRIS Kelowna. And as you can see in the photos above which is on the next slide um based is Rocky Mountain Adaptive sports which is based here in Canmore, Alberta but often goes to Banff as well. These photos of me skiing with the instructor from Rocky Mountain Adaptive Sports center was taken at Brown's Sunshine Village Ski Resort. It was my first day of downhill skiing. I didn't fall while going downhill. The only time I fell was when I tried to go uphill on the magic carpet conveyor belt. Everyone from everything from the ski boots to the skis to the poles to helmet gondola ride, an instructor was provided free of charge by the owner of Rocky Mountain Adaptive Sports Center (RMASC). It's goal is to remove as many barriers as possible so they can so people with disabilities can enjoy doing a variety of activities outside in the Canadian Rockies. It's CRIS Kelowna is their BC brother agency. They do the same thing, same work RMASC does. The only difference is that they are based in Kelowna, BC. I met the owners of both groups when I was volunteering with Alberta Parks Push to Open Program. I wish everyone with disabilities across Canada had access to these type of groups that help people with disabilities enjoy the outdoors. Next slide.

Not all disabilities are visible. Here's a clip of me and some of other disabled Push to Open ambassadors riding ATVs. This video does show that with the right support people with disabilities can do whatever they want to do outside. Video dialogue: Excited about going for a chair ride? Yeah. Okay let me know when you are getting tired. The goal of Alberta Park's Push to Open Program is that everyone has the support they need to be fully included in nature. For Cara that means that she's now able to go down a path through the forest near Drayton Valley. It's called the TrailRider and it's just one of the many things that allow us to modify the user not the environment to make it possible for people to do different sorts of things. The trail rider in particular has actually been up to Mount Kilimanjaro into the base camp of Mount Everest. I feel like it's getting away from you guys. Just let me know and I'll break And it just shows that with some determination and teamwork and a big fat wheel you can get almost anywhere. In the back you're just concerned about balance and then keeping your hand close to the break. If you start going down a good downhill the person driving it's Cara, though she's the one in charge, she tells us when we're going too fast, tells us if she's not feeling safe or not feeling comfortable. It's all about teamwork within the team and the person in the trail rider is as much part of the team as anyone else. Jelly is the other trail. Video ends.

A quote from my friend Cecile Buhl: "When one has been pushed to the periphery, benched, pushed aside, ignored and told they better sit out, it is beyond comprehension that there would be a time when you could try things without criticism, without good hearted competition and with acceptance." Cecile Buhl Alberta Parks Push to Open Ambassador 2008. Thank you for listening to my presentation. Any questions?

**Alison Whiting:** Thank you Mary. Thank you so much for sharing that with us. Uh we do have a couple of questions come in. Uh the when you were using the trail rider was it easy to access a trail rider in the rockies or like was there a designated place you picked it up or did you access it through an organization like Rocky Mountain Adaptive?

**Mary Salvani:** It is um you can access it through Alberta Parks through there through various places within the park system like Fish Creek Provincial Park and also now William Watson Lodge, however in my case I accessed it through Rocky Mountain Adaptive Sports. They they take it anywhere wherever you are.

**Alison Whiting:** Okay oh wonderful and the ones that the uh the provincial parks, Alberta Parks are offering do that, does that then come with the volunteers that are needed in order to be able to utilize the trail rider or is that something that you were having to provide yourself?

**Mary Salvani:** That's something you will have to provide yourself. They will train you how to do it.

**Alison Whiting:** Good very nice. And do you have any other experience using some of the other adaptive equipment like all terrain wheelchairs and things like that when you've been out?

**Mary Salvani:** Yeah I've also used the new um the new park wheelchair that they have. That's the three uh three trays like a tricycle one? Um I actually help them develop the new electronic wheelchair that they have so that that one does not require volunteers, however that one doesn't go up as steep a trail as the one that you've seen in the video does.

**Alison Whiting:** Oh amazing. Thank you so much. I think we'll leave it there for now what we'll do is we'll send over all the additional questions for you to answer at a later time. Amazing thank you so much for for sharing that with us today.

**Mary Salvani:** Thank you.