

# Adaptive Snowsports on Vancouver Island

Submitted by Vancouver Island Society for Adaptive Snowsports

The Vancouver Island Society for Adaptive Snowsports (VISAS) is an organization that provides opportunities for people with disabilities to ski and snowboard. It is an entirely volunteer run program, and there are approximately 100 volunteer instructors each Winter season who donate their time and energy to providing learning opportunities on the snow.

During the Winter at Mount Washington, free adaptive snowsports lessons are offered seven days a week, with a booking. Mount Washington is very generous in its support of the program and when students come up to participate in snowsports, they are provided with generous discounts and freebies. VISAS is also provided with their own room in the main lodge at Mount Washington for their students and instructors.

Lessons in adaptive snowsports are lessons on snow, which are adapted to suit the needs of the student. Sit-skiing is the discipline which most people think of when they hear of adaptive snowsports. This is a type of ski which has a 'bucket' for the student to sit in, allowing people who do not have strength or feeling in their legs to get out there and ski the slopes. If you have ever seen competitive sit-skiers race in the Paralympics, you will have an idea of just how fast these skiers can go, and the incredible skill involved!



Students at VISAS can choose which snowsports discipline they are interested in pursuing, based on what will best suit their strengths and needs. They can participate in nordic, alpine, snowboard, or sit-ski. There is equipment, instruction and snowsports to suit everybody!

Opportunities for adaptive snowsports instruction began in the early 1960's by a small group of dedicated outdoor enthusiasts. The group was led by Herb Bradley, and they began by running ski lessons for people with physical and developmental disabilities at the former Forbidden Plateau ski resort. Bradley is a local legend, who donated countless volunteer hours promoting sport and recreation in the Comox Valley for both able-bodied folks and those with disabilities.

In 1983, the Vancouver Island Skiing for the Disabled Society was officially established at Mount Washington Alpine Resort as a non-profit, charitable society. Adapting techniques based on the teaching methodologies of the Canadian Ski Instructors Alliance (CSIA), and Canadian Association of Snowboard Instructors (CASI), volunteer instructors have introduced hundreds of students to the thrill of



learning to slide on snow.

Known today as the Vancouver Island Society for Adaptive Snowsports (VISAS), the program has grown into a strong and dedicated team of students and instructors. The race program is a core group of young teens and adults who show up for training weekly and compete across the country. Originally the group started as a development group for students who wanted to take their skills to a higher level. Eventually it became competitive and VISAS students became racers competing at Provincial, National and even International level. Some past and present Paralympic athletes that began skiing at VISAS include Carly Grigg, Gordy Tuck, Andrea Disweier and Braydon Luscombe.

Two festivals are held each year. The Annual Snowsports Festival, scheduled to take place January 3-7, 2016, is aimed at students who are new to snowsports. Participants who are accepted into the festival are given four days of lessons on snow, with almost everything provided. This festival is much loved by both students and instructors, providing a great chance for students to grow and progress.

VISAS also hosts the National Veteran's Ski and



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Snowboard week, which will be held January 31 to February 5, 2016, and is in its ninth year at Mount Washington. This festival is sponsored by Soldier On, a military support program which provides events and possibilities for ill and injured military veterans to stay active and engaged in the community. Forty students from across the country will spend five days on snow learning or improving their snowsports skills. For both festivals, students choose one of the four disciplines: nordic, alpine, sit-ski, or snowboard.

The biggest fundraiser for the year is the Herb Bradley challenge, held in honour of one of the core founding members. This involves a fun 'guesstimation' race which brings supporters and students together. Teams that support VISAS are partnered with a VISAS student, and together they form a race team. Costumes are common, and good times are mandatory.

With the strong support of Mount Washington, the tireless effort of VISAS' wonderful volunteers, and the boundless enthusiasm of their fantastic students, VISAS will continue to provide adaptive snowsports opportunities to all those who are interested and in need.

To become a student or volunteer instructor, or to participate in any of VISAS' great events,



please contact VISAS president Tom Clarke at: 250-923-5187.

Visit the website: www.visasweb.ca, or check us out on Facebook. Applications for the 2016 Adaptive Snowsports Festival are also available online.



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