

# Call for support worker indicative of staffing shortage

**Scott Stanfield**  
Record staff

Longtime Courtenay residents are bound to know Al Craig.

The 38-year-old autistic man has worked many years at Home Depot, where he sweeps, collects buggies and keeps the recycling program in check.

On Tuesdays, he picks up litter on streets for the City of Courtenay. He also volunteers at the soup kitchen.

Al lives in his own home in Courtenay, along with a longtime roommate, Lis. He receives some one-to-one support, but more staff members are required to provide round-the-clock support.

"We need to secure two staff for the home," said Lynne Powell, Al's legal representative. "If there isn't stability here in this residence, then they're at risk of losing this, and perhaps

losing being in their own community."

Al was orphaned at age two. Powell met Al when he was a 12-year-old student at Royston Elementary, where she was a teacher assistant. He would go on to graduate from Vanier Secondary.

"I stayed with him until he finished school."

Powell is part of a non-profit organization dubbed Al's Pals, a microboard that's been supporting him for 17 years. Support workers can help Al plan his life, ensure his safety and connect with the community by way of fun activities.

"He's able to go out and do what a lot of individuals in group homes can't do, because they don't have the established one-to-one," Powell said. "He's physically active, he bikes and hikes, and goes to the pub on Friday nights."

Al would also like to enrol in a private art class in order to enhance the display in his home.

Powell had hired three support workers, but each one moved on because they found a better paying job. The pay is \$18.22 per hour. From speaking with other agencies, she says there is a shortage of support workers, locally and throughout the province.

"There is a significant shortage of qualified staff to provide support to children or adults with extra needs," said Joanne Schroeder of the

Comox Valley Child Development Association.

"This is the case in most communities in B.C." Powell has — to no avail — tried to find a support worker for Al through a newspaper advertisement.

"I know there's somebody out there who will work with him," she said. "He's so well known in the community, but he's not well known in a job ad."

Anyone interested in working with Al can contact Powell at residentsupport@hotmail.com



Al Craig plays an electronic drum kit at his Courtenay home. Scott Stanfield