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The last few years have been tumultuous. A once-in-a-generation disruption like this global pandemic helps us to remember what is important. It forever changes the way we live and how we interact with our world. While the pandemic has been catastrophic, history has shown that times of disruption can lead to *new possibilities*.

In remembering the world wars of the past century, we commit to working for peace to avoid such horrendous events in the future. Even while wars were raging, though, people's resilience and creativity led to small innovations and shifts that have forever changed our world:

- As men left home to fight, women went to work in new ways – a catalyst for shifting gender roles that led to greater equality for women in the workforce and education.
- The influenza pandemic of 1918 led the U.S. to invest heavily in the development of the ground-breaking flu vaccine that continues to save lives today.
- The mass production of penicillin began during World War II. England and the US increased production of this crucial medicine which became available to the public following the war.
- Alan Turing's work in deciphering codes led to advancements that were foundational for modern computing. We also saw the development of jet engines, microwaves, and countless improvements in health care.

While these advancements could never justify the losses and destruction of world wars, they demonstrate the human capacity to persevere, shift, and innovate when disruptions occur.

The Hebrew Bible points to another momentous historical disruption – the coming of the *Messiah* (the deliverer or saviour of the people). While this prophesy was a threat to the established political order, the coming of the Messiah was full of hope and promised justice and *shalom* (peace) for people who had been oppressed and marginalized. These verses foretell Jesus' birth:

*"In the wilderness prepare the way for the Lord;
make straight in the desert a highway for our God.
Every valley shall be raised up, every mountain and hill made low;
the rough ground shall become level, the rugged places a plain.
And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all people will see it together."*

(Isaiah 40:3-5a, NIV)

Isaiah's writing paints a picture of the momentum needed to build new possibilities—transforming deserts, rugged wilderness, and even mountains! As disability advocates, we read how these verses are about removing barriers to full access – flattening hills, filling in ruts, and paving a way so that all people can receive God's justice and peace together.

As we move forward in hope and have grown on our journey through the pandemic, we look forward to building new possibilities together. Another biblical example (Mark 2:1-12) tells how a group of friends tore a hole in the roof of a home to help a person with disabilities meet Jesus. "Building new possibilities" might involve building accessible spaces or tearing down tangible barriers - physical accessibility will always be a part of our work. New possibilities may mean, instead, building "smooth paths" for people to access their community by establishing relational bridges, paving the way for greater inclusion, and breaking down attitudinal barriers.

Our new theme for 2023 is *"Moving forward together: Building possibilities."* This theme came from people who use our services and *Our Voices Matter* self-advocates who told us they were excited to continue collaborating with Christian Horizons. They want to make real progress and improve the broader community. We also heard from employees through our Onward Communication Champions and the On the Horizons annual theme survey. You're excited to be a part of the transformation movement! You are passionate about community building and co-designing and co-creating our future together with people who use our services.

We loved your input and are we're looking forward to moving forward together: Not each of us in our own direction but through an overall strategy that better equips people to direct their own lives. While we must learn from the past, we cannot just go back to the way things were. We are excited to see what we build together—new possibilities that foster belonging for everybody.

We leave you with a reaction to our new theme from one of our Onward Communication Champions. What's yours?

"As we see the sunrise on the horizon following the past few challenging years, it is inspiring to consider all that we have learned, and the goals that we have begun working toward, together. ...We demonstrated resilience as we persevered and came together, committed to positive changes and collaboration. We will continue working together toward greater success, exploring endless possibilities for those who we support, the agency, ourselves, and the larger sector. I cannot wait to see what possibilities we will build and what change will come about!" ~ Michelle Abbott, Program Manager – Guelph Wellington

Making the Connection

- When you think of "Moving forward together," what does teamwork look like where you work? What does it look like with the people who use Christian Horizons services?
- Building Possibilities: What are some opportunities and possibilities that you see in the coming year? What are you looking forward to?