

Home on one level is No. 1 priority

Diana's Story

Diana Salcedo lives in Vancouver with her husband and three sons, ages 1, 8, and 10 years. Her 8-year-old, Emiliano, was born with cerebral palsy and is profoundly deaf and legally blind. The family lives on the second floor of a detached house, in a 3-bedroom rental unit. They've been there for seven years. There is no elevator, and there are 12 steps on the stairs to the street.

Emiliano's manual wheelchair is made up of three pieces. To take Emiliano anywhere, Salcedo must first get him ready, place him on his bed, take the wheelchair apart, bring the three pieces downstairs, put them together, then carry Emiliano down the narrow stairs. "We do this several times a day."

Emiliano also has a power wheelchair that he uses when he's out of the house. He can see well enough to drive it around by controlling it with his head, and gets help to navigate safely. That wheelchair also has an eye-gaze system that allows him to communicate. But that chair weighs 250 kilograms, so it can't be brought into the house. That leaves Emiliano with less independence and communication when he's at home.

“We take him everywhere – school, shopping, museums. Now that he’s bigger, he gets bored at home,” Salcedo said.

She said that finding a new home is her no. 1 priority. Her family has been on a waiting list with BC Housing for five years. They need a home with everything on one level. Looking ahead, they’ll need a lift system in the ceiling to get Emiliano from the wheelchair to his bed, but they can’t do renovations in rental housing. They also need a modified bathroom. “We need a fully accessible space.”

Salcedo has been in touch with The Right Fit program, which tries to match clients with suitable new housing developments and co-ops. But the family’s need for three bedrooms makes it hard to find something.