

Woman left high and dry for months by broken wheelchair lifts at pool

By: [Kevin Rollason](#) | Posted: 12/2/2019 7:00 PM |

Winnipeg's award-winning fully accessible pool was in need of repairs for several months, leaving the mother of a woman in a wheelchair upset over the city's inaction and seeming lack of concern.

All four change-room lifts at Sergeant Tommy Prince Place (formerly the North Centennial Recreation and Leisure Facility) were broken in early summer, preventing Wendy Preteau's 24-year-old daughter Kristen from using the pool, the only one in the city with the required equipment.



Wendy Preteau and her daughter Kristen are upset that the Tommy Prince Place swimming pool accessible changing rooms have been out of order since mid-summer.

"It is just frustrating," Preteau said Monday, explaining her daughter has cerebral palsy.

"She loves to get into the water, but she can't because of this. They closed the pool for renovations in September, but when it reopened, the lifts were still broken.

"It just doesn't seem fair."

The city announced in August that the pool on the Old Exhibition Grounds and the Elmwood Kildonans Pool would both be fully closed from Sept. 3 to 28 for regular maintenance work. But the specialty change rooms didn't reopen.

A message on the city website page for the pool Monday said the specialty change room was closed for maintenance until further notice and advised anyone seeking further information to call 311.

However, a few hours after the Free Press made inquiries about the problem, the message was removed from the website.

"They closed the pool for renovations in September, but when it reopened, the lifts were still broken... It just doesn't seem fair." – Wendy Preteau

"As of today, the benches have been fixed and the specialty change room, including all four lifts and benches, are operational for public use," a city spokeswoman told the Free Press in an email.

The change rooms reopened Nov. 15, the spokeswoman said, but they were closed again last week for safety reasons after a bench broke.

Coun. Sherri Rollins, the chairwoman of the protection, community services and parks committee, said she wants to find out how frequently the lifts have been out of service and have the city produce a schedule in future for when things like this will be repaired.

"We report when there is a closure, but, in situations like this, we don't report why it is closed or when it will reopen," she said.

Wendy Preteau said she began contacting the city through 311 last July, but when she checked again last week the change rooms were still closed.

"This shouldn't be something I should have to fight for, but I've had to," she said. "They put a new floor in, but the lifts are still broken. They said at one point they should be fixed in 15 days, but they weren't."

Earlier, David Kron, executive director of the Cerebral Palsy Association of Manitoba, said he has received several complaints about the lifts being broken.

"This is the only truly accessible pool in Winnipeg," Kron said.

"It was specifically built for this community. It is really problematic when they can't maintain it, especially when it was just renovated."

Win Bridgman, the architect whose firm designed the accessibility features at the pool — including the ramp that allows not only people in special beach wheelchairs to be pushed right into the pool itself but also people of all abilities to get into the water — also expressed disappointment.

"This just seems ridiculous that this would happen," Bridgman said. "We made those change rooms to be accessible. We put seats in there and special washrooms. But you have to keep maintaining things."

The architectural firm received an accessibility award from the city's former access advisory committee for the ramp in 2010.

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Kevin Rollason is one of the more versatile reporters at the Winnipeg Free Press. Whether it is covering city hall, the law courts, or general reporting, Rollason can be counted on to not only answer the 5 Ws — Who, What, When, Where and Why — but to do it in an interesting and accessible way for readers.