A Snapshot of Our Special Needs Community / Un coup d'oeil sur notre communauté aux besoins particuliers

Fall / Automne 2014
Winter / Hiver 2015

INSPIRATIONS

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Vol. 7 No. 1

Local 'Citizen Clown' visits Guatemala

Humanitarian clown Guy Giard sharing the love with kids in an orphanage in Guatemala during his mission with Dr. Patch Adams. (Photo courtesy of Guy Giard)

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YCC Special Needs Family Camp: Creating many firsts!

By Wendy Singer

Hannah Rich with Mike Rich, and Ilana Keeb-Rich (with cake from Ilana's company 'Creative Cakes'), Sid Milech and Matthew Selvin at YCC Special Needs Family Camp. (Photo credit, Stephen Rabinovitch)

This past summer, the Harry Bronfman Y Country Camp (YCC) inaugurated the YCC Special Needs Family Camp. It was the first program of its kind in Canada.

Funded in part by the Schwam Family and other donors, this initiative was modeled after the special needs program at Camp Ramah in the Poconos. This four-day camp that ran from August 14 to 17, 2014, was all about catering to nine families with special needs children. YCC directors Sid Milech and Stephen Rabinovitch, and Special Needs Coordinator Matthew Selvin, made sure that no need was left unattended.

"Our goal was to give children the full camp experience and take the burden off of parents and siblings," said Milech. "Holidays are not slam-dunks for these families. Here they could let their hair down."

Each special needs camper was partnered with a 'buddy', and a group of YCC Counsellors-In-Training (CITs) were on hand to support the staff. Thorough training was a key ingredient to this successful initiative. "Each counsellor, or buddy, had a profile about their assigned camper in advance so they could be best prepared to care for the child," shared Selvin. "When working with special needs campers it is important to know who you are working with and have strategies prepared to implement."

Parents were welcomed to take advantage of the camp facilities on their own or join their children at activities. Many opted to attend these activities, not wanting to miss an opportunity to witness firsts - the first time in a canoe, sharing a bonfire with friends, or a hayride. As parent Ilana Keeb Rich best exclaimed, "I can't believe my Hannah climbed a wall and went canoeing!"

To combat rainy weather, the staff were equipped with rainy day activities, from swimming in the heated indoor pool to decorating umbrellas at The Ben Schwam Arts & Crafts Centre.

"A special highlight for parents was free time after the kids were put to bed (with staff acting as babysitters). We had a late night bonfire, and an 'Ask Rabbi Adam Scheier' gathering," shared Milech. "It was wonderful for parents to have this relaxing time together, knowing that their kids were under excellent supervision just a short distance away."

"The experience was extraordinary," shares parent Julie Kristoff. "Buddies for the kids with needs, CITs to hang out with the siblings, support from Rabbi Scheier… and we all got to go to camp! Mimi brags that she went to sleep away camp like her brother. Most of all, the days provided much needed respite for parents, many of whom manage on their own, in a non-judgemental and open community."

The CITs presented awards to each of the campers (best smile, best laugh, best athlete, etc), and all campers and their families were given a unique YCCTikvah camp t-shirt (tikvah means 'hope').

Families can look forward to another YCC Special Needs Family Camp in summer 2015!

For information contact Sid Milech at smilech@ymywha.com or 514-737-6551, #262.

CIT (Counsellor in training) Emily Sarid, and Julie Kristof with her daughter Miriam Yazer at the YCC Special Needs Family Camp. (Photo credit, Stephen Rabinovitch)

Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration:

Leslie Levinson

By Cindy Davis

In 1998, after having taught various classes at the Mackay Centre School for nine years, Leslie Levinson attended a Montreal conference on Augmentative Communication that would change the course of her career. Determined to integrate what she had observed into the school's program, Levinson gained approval to immerse herself into a three-day workshop held in New York. That summer, hand-in-hand with the rehabilitation department at the Mackay Centre School, she developed the Augmentative Communication Class, which she still runs today.

"It is a specialized class for children with disabilities whose receptive language is better than their expressive," says Levinson. "They can understand and process things but have no means of expressing them. We teach them communication systems."

The age range and ability level varies widely in Levinson's class, and she develops individual communication strategies accordingly. Some students move their heads to answer questions and some simply look in one direction for one response and in a different direction for another. In each case, the goal is to empower the students with the crucial life-ability to express their needs. "Communication is important for everybody. It is how you interact with the world and with society to get your point across. Without it there is nothing," says Levinson, who feels gratified when she sees progress. "When it clicks and when they realize that their actions elicit something, feedback from other people, it is self-fulfilling and they want it again and again. We all celebrate their success."

In addition to teaching her class, Levinson follows her students to their other classes where they are able to socialize with peers in their own age range. She works with the teachers and support staff in the communication process and she programs the students' communication devices according to their curricula.

Twice a year, Levinson also takes her students to Camp Massawippi in the Eastern Townships for a three-day camping adventure, which also offers parents some respite. Accompanied by staff and caregivers, Levinson's kids are able to experience the joys of summer camp. She also coordinates a yearly hockey outing, enabling her students to 'just be kids.' "When they get out onto the open ice, they are in a free open space where no one is going to get in their way."

Fadi Hassoune, Leslie Levinson, Joncarlo Bellini-Dery, Caroline Elias, and Owen Smith.

Though Levinson is honoured to be the recipient of the Teacher of Inspiration award, she is quick to give credit to the entire MacKay team who she says have always supported her. "Leslie is a very dedicated teacher, who demonstrates compassion towards all her students and their families," says Patrizia Ciccarelli, Principal at the Mackay Centre School. "She is patient, caring and is able to elicit smiles from all her students. She is not only their teacher; she cares for them like a mother. I am very proud to have Leslie as one of my teachers."

Parent Caroline Elias, who nominated Levinson for this award, agrees. "Leslie has a special understanding of the unique needs and abilities of each student in her class and does her utmost to help each one reach his or her full potential," says Elias. "She is always sensitive to the many concerns of the parents, providing a patient and reassuring presence in our lives."

"Some people look at those kids and see the disability, I look at them and see that they are just kids," says Levinson, whose passion and commitment to her students are evident. "The parents go through so much, they need to know that when they send their kids off (to school) they are in a secure environment and that they are well loved." With Leslie Levinson as a teacher, there is no doubt about that.

Cindy Davis is the public relations coordinator at the Jewish Public Library in Montreal as well as a freelance journalist.

Paul Michael Laxton and Leslie Levinson.

Dynamic Funds was established as a small investment club in Montreal in 1957, where it was a pioneer in providing professional investment advice to retail investors. Since then, Dynamic has evolved to become one of Canada's most recognized wealth management firms. They offer a comprehensive range of products and services, spanning every major sector, geographic region and investment discipline. Dynamic's financial solutions include open and closed-end investment funds, fee-based, tax-advantaged and customized high-net-worth programs. If you have a Caregiver of Inspiration to nominate, email mcohen@inspirationsnews.com.

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Peter Hall School salutes the Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration

By Wendy Singer

We were honoured to celebrate the Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2014, Tamara Novak, with the warm and dedicated staff of Peter Hall School at their end of school award breakfast.

Maryvonne Robert, director of Peter Hall's Cote Vertu Campus commended Novak, who has worked at Peter Hall School for 20 years, for her devotion to the well-being of all of her students and the people she works with.

With Inspirations editor Michael Cohen in attendance, we presented Novak with gift cards from our loyal sponsors Tim Horton's and Cinémas Guzzo.

Jason and Ellis Goldsmith from The Big Blue Hug presented Novak with the painting RISE which is based on a drawing that Ellis drew after uniting with friends at a Walk Now for Autism Speaks Canada event. Goldsmith describes this painting: "When Ellis was greeted by all of his friends, his face lit up. He was jumping up and down in sheer delight, moved by this show of solidarity. Despite what many believe, being autistic often means having a BIGGER heart than most." This is a message that Novak fosters on a daily basis.

Tamara Novak with Wendy Singer, Ellis Goldsmith and Jason Goldsmith, accepting her Big Blue Hug Painting, gift card from Tim Horton's, and Cinémas Guzzo passes.

Alexandra Desbiens-Leighton, vice-principal of Peter Hall's Cote Vertu Campus, describes Novak as very caring, hard working, and a model employee. She explained how vital Novak, and all of her colleagues on the crisis intervention team are, and commended her for her work with the school's ball hockey team and their participation in the Défi Sportif Altergo. It was an emotional speech, which really brought home the true value of all of the caregivers at Peter Hall School. The school administration presented Novak with a beautiful glass-framed version of the Caregiver of Inspiration article that ran in our Spring/Summer 2014 edition.

Thank you to the administration of Peter Hall School, including director Mr. Jean Laliberté, Dynamic Funds, Tim Horton's, Cinémas Guzzo, The Big Blue Hug, for their contributions to this award program.

Peter Hall is a private, bilingual school recognized and subsidized in the public interest by the Ministère de l'Éducation du Loisir et du Sport. In conjunction with the Ministry, Peter Hall offers individualized and functional educational programs based on the student and his or her learning needs. For information contact www.peterhall.qc.ca or call 514-748-6727.

If you have a Caregiver of Inspiration to nominate, email mcohen@inspirationsnews.com.

Tamara Novak and Alexandra Desbiens-Leighton.

Tamara with students Jonathan and Justin.

Working together to foster independence

By Cheryl Nichiporowich

Patti Buchanan, principal of REACH (Realistic Educational Alternatives for Children with Handicaps), along with Natasha MacDonald, coordinator of Saint-Lambert's Community Learning Centre (CLC), joined the Riverside School Board's (RSB) multidisciplinary Autism Task Force to plan an evening session for parents. The saying "Great minds think alike," comes to mind as I reflect on the details that went into the planning.

Both parties shared the same vision - reach out and collaborate with local organizations to build bridges and provide support for the parents of our students with autism and intellectual disabilities in our community.

The evening took place on April 30, 2014 at the RSB, where the halls buzzed with excitement and sharing of information from local organizations such as: The Miriam Home, Assante, ARSDI, RAPID, FDMT, Camera Roll Productions, ACSSSN Parent Committee, RSB Professional staff, and Rekinexion (Brain Gym). After one half hour of interactive browsing, parents were invited to attend presentations provided by three distinguished speakers.

Audrey Burt, President, Soutien Autism(e) Support (S.au S.) and former teacher at RSB spoke from her heart, sharing stories of her own trials and tribulations of raising a child on the autism spectrum, offering information about S.au.S, whose mission is to support families of children of all ages with various special needs on the South Shore, and a helpful hand to those looking for support. Burt shared how she found distance running as a way of coping and how this newfound passion helped her develop her vision for S.au.S.

Tara Flanagan, Ph.D, Director of research group SPARC - Social Policy, Advocacy, Research & Community, shed light on the importance of fostering independence by working towards facilitating an environment that is conducive to building independence into a child's routine. She reported on research that supported social inclusion by emphasizing self-determination, and shared responsibility for successful outcomes.

Jovette Francoeur, Special Needs Consultant and Coordinator of the Centre of Excellence for Autism at Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB), wrapped up the evening with a multitude of strategies, tools, resources, and ideas that parents could bring home and try with their children. She inspired parents of young children and/or, young adults, to think outside of the box by starting gently to guide their child or young adult to be more independent at home. She offered simple suggestions for nurturing independence with tasks such as opening the blinds each morning to welcome each new day or closing the blinds to indicate it's time for bed, and using visual schedules at home and school to promote continuity and increase autonomy throughout one's day.

Jovette Fracoeur (left) with Cheryl Nichiporowich holding one of several paintings that were presented to speakers. The paintings were created by students from REACH. (Photo credit, Chantale Scroggins)

The three-hour evening session received an overwhelmingly positive response by all who attended. Parents left with a beautiful reusable bag from FDMT and filled it with information, business cards and leaflets, from the various kiosks.

Cheryl Nichiporowich is a Special Education Technician at the Riverside School Board.

Supporting students with ASD and problem behaviour: Workshop at the EMSB

By Tania Piperni, M.Ed.

On August 22, 2014, Pat Mirenda, Ph.D., BCBA-D, presented to professionals in the Student Services Department at the English Montreal School Board (EMSB). Dr. Mirenda is a professor in the Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, and Director of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research and Collaboration in Autism (CIRCA) at the University of British Columbia. The topic discussed was supporting students with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and problem behaviour. The presentation provided participants with an overview of processes for conducting functional behaviour assessments and designing positive behaviour support plans for individuals with ASD who engage in problem behaviour.

Positive behaviour support relies on proactive interventions that try to prevent problem behaviours from occurring. It involves a plan for crisis management but it is not the primary intervention. To begin with, a thorough functional behaviour assessment is a must, to identify the relationships between behaviour and environment. Through this assessment, the professional identifies a student profile, the behaviour of concern, the setting events, the possible antecedents and possible consequences that are involved. Only then can a hypothesis about the function of this behaviour be made and then confirmed through direct observation.

Dr. Mirenda described the four functions of behaviour: to get a tangible reinforcer, to get attention, to escape/avoid a situation, or get/escape stimulation. “The goal of functional behaviour assessment is to understand the behaviour of concern from the person’s perspective. The second goal is to use this information to design a behaviour support plan.” Once created, this plan can help change or eliminate the challenging behaviour and teaches the person appropriate behaviours that serve the same function.

Dr. Mirenda, using a great sense of humour throughout the day-long workshop, ended with a discussion on how to design multi-component behaviour support plans, using a variety of strategies appropriate to a school setting including progressive relaxation training and imagery procedures.

This presentation was made possible due to collaboration between the EMSB Student Services Department and Dr. Mayada Elsabbagh, assistant professor in Psychiatry at McGill University working directly with the ASD Clinic at the Montreal Children’s Hospital. This partnership was sponsored by the Donald Cohen Research, Practice and Policy Series as well as the Autism Research Training Program.

The EMSB looks forward to similar collaborations in the near future.

Tania Piperni is the Autism Spectrum Disorder Consultant at the English Montreal School Board.

Dr. Pat Mirenda speaking at the EMSB. (Photo credit, Tania Piperni)

EMSB guidance services benefit students with special needs

By Elaine Cohen

Parents and pupils often refer to high school guidance counsellors as career advisers but few realize this activity is just one facet of their multidisciplinary role. At the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) guidance service is under the aegis of the Student Services Department. Director Lew Lewis and high school guidance counsellors Karen Allen and Betty Stamatakos recently clarified how their services benefit all students, especially adolescents with special concerns.

“The guidance counsellors assume a very significant role in their respective high schools with regard to being an integral part of the team of professionals, teachers, and administrators whose mission is to address the multiple needs of all students including those students with particular challenges,” Lewis said.

Allen and Stamatakos, based at Westmount High and John F. Kennedy High, respectively, describe themselves as professionals assigned to oversee and ensure students are accommodated according to their particular needs. The overall objective is to maximize each student’s potential taking into account academic, social, emotional and physical aspects.

“We’re like GPs (family doctors) because many issues are triaged by the guidance department,” said Allen. Both of them are experienced guidance counsellors by profession and are members of the OCCOPPQ (Ordre des Conseilleurs et Conseillères d’Orientation et des Psychoéducateurs et Psychoéducatrices du Québec). “We’re there to promote health and wellness but when students struggle in or out of class, we look to see what is disturbing them and how to get them back on track. After we do the initial assessment, we make the appropriate referral and may consult with other professionals such as speech psychologists, occupational therapists, special education consultants, spiritual community animators and child workers in different categories.”

Stamatakos and Allen are grateful for the close-knit interaction among the guidance counsellors and personnel connected with Student Services. “We meet once a month and review issues,” Allen said. “We rely on one another and share information. On a personal level, I find it helps tie everything together that we do in my school.”

Liberal leader Justin Trudeau, MP Papineau, attends opening of the Pierre Elliott Trudeau Student Support Centre (October 2013) at John F. Kennedy High School. The centre, named in memory of Trudeau’s father, benefits students with academic and personal needs. (Photo courtesy of EMSB)

The EMSB tries to distribute resources so that guidance counsellors are accessible in all schools. “We are involved in programs such as conflict resolution, anger management, short-term counselling, study skills, and other issues,” Stamatakos relates. “We embrace their disabilities by focusing on strengths and abilities. In some instances, the trick is to introduce students to activities they enjoy. By plugging them into school programs of interest, they become confident and respond by opening up.”

Alluding to her school’s leadership program, Allen said some students initially feel awkward with their peers. “To alleviate this discomfort, we try to get students involved in extracurricular activities that will allow them to flourish and develop leadership skills. It’s gratifying to see these children get through their struggles and thrive by graduation.”

Stamatakos concurs, pointing to sports as a big draw at John F. Kennedy. Some of the students that struggle academically are extremely adept athletically, she observes. “We accommodate them by opening the gym at 7:30 a.m., at lunch hour and after school. When engaged in sports their faces light up.”

Stamatakos takes pride in the innovative Pierre Elliott Trudeau Student Support Centre which opened October 2013 at John F. Kennedy High in St. Michel. The supervised facility is accessible to students during school hours. A student that may be weak in math but competent in another subject such as ethics is referred to math tutoring during ethics period. In turn, a teacher uses a free period to offer math help. Another scenario may involve an emotionally overwhelmed student seeking solace in a peaceful setting.

“The Support Centre model fills an immediate need,” Stamatakos said. “Parents and students appreciate it. We’re continually tweaking it. Students are motivated to learn and improve in this smaller setting.”

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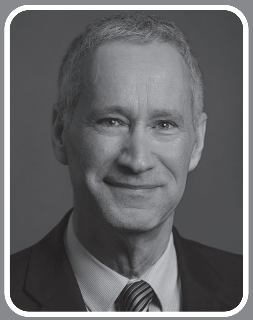

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Nous sommes fiers d'appuyer Inspirations Newspaper, qui joue un rôle important dans notre communauté.

Guest Editorial

By Beverly Nadler Cammy

Beverly Cammy enjoying a day out with her daughter Lacey.

Inspiration comes from different sources. For me, it has been the challenges that I have met in my life, which have spurred me on!

An ongoing theme in conversation between myself and a certain Gentleman who will know who he is when he reads this piece of work, has been, "Have you gotten the word out there?"

Writing has always been very cathartic for me. Not knowing what might result in putting these thoughts down on paper for all of you coffee and newspaper purveyors to read; at least I am unloading my heart and indeed getting the word out there! Thank you Kind Gentleman for giving me the catalyst to do so!

Twenty-seven years ago, I was given a "gift." Back then, I did not see this as such. In those early days I deemed the birth of my daughter with a Global Developmental Delay, as somewhat of a challenge that would show the core of my existence. I cried for days, locked myself in my bedroom for another day, then accepted my fate and never looked back!

Lack of space does not permit me to delve into the particulars, but suffice it to say, parenting a newborn baby girl with special needs, rendered me a full-time "Professional." There was no time for the simple pleasure of choosing coloured hair bows to match girly frocks. Time was of the essence. Early intervention was vital. The "sponge" had to soak up all she could at once.

In those early years, I was younger, vital, and in good physical health. I was motivated to bring my daughter to the sum of her potential. The end of the rainbow (for as hard as the journey was, there just had to be one) was that some day, she would reside in a group home, indeed my reassurance that she would always be cared for long after my husband and I were no longer alive.

At the required age of her turning 16, I diligently completed all of the paperwork pertaining to future group home placement with Miriam Home and Services. I did not only tick off the boxes asking for "yes" and "no" responses, but I also added a heartfelt line or two or three or more, firmly enhancing our needs. I was then told to wait. It is now eleven years later and we are still waiting! The only difference is, my "27-year-old child" still requires my day-to-day supervision and I am now 27 years older; I am not getting any younger. I have developed certain health issues that no longer make me invincible. A thirty-year marriage has been strained not due to a lack of love, but certainly a result in many special needs families. Yet, we are still told to wait!

Life is indeed a "Waiting Game." We all wait in line at the supermarket, yet at the end of it all, we arrive home with lots of good food to sustain energy. We wait in line at the gas pump to fill up the tank and even though we complain about the price, (now that's another story) we still leave the station with the fuel we need to get us to our next destination. In these two scenarios, "Waiting" serves a purpose!

I grew up in the late fifties and early sixties, with a wonderful story book titled, *The Little Engine That Could*. The moral of this children's book classic serves as a metaphor to life. The little red engine travelled far and wide on its journey with just one tank of gas, yet, when this very tired engine had to climb a very high hill in order to reach its final destination point, it just simply could not because the tank had been depleted. It was only when the engine came to life and he began to utter, "I think I can, I think I can, I know I can," that the engine could finally get up that hill.

So, I have not given up hope. My daughter's name is not even close to the top of the waiting list for a number of reasons, one being that she does not pose a behavioural problem in the home, another one being she has a stable environment with two loving parents. Even though she constantly asks, "Have they found me a group home yet?" The true reality is there are not enough Miriam Home Group Homes to house all those who need and want them.

My daughter in her innocence wants that sense of "normalcy" in living with friends and thus beginning a life independent of her mom and dad.

There have been many generous benefactors to the Miriam Home that have resulted in the purchase of existing group homes on the Island of Montreal. A lack of present day funding for the purchase of new group homes is a disease onto itself.

To quote the late Maya Angelou, "Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud." The intellectually disabled community deserves the dignity and respect to be cared for, simply because they cannot do so on their own. Loving, devoted and caring parents deserve to see their children living productive lives. I have been told that when I die, a group home spot will be found. Is it selfish of me to want to realize my dream in my living years? Am I unreasonable in wanting to witness my daughter feel safe, protected and useful beyond the cocoon of mom and dad? Is it also selfish to say that perhaps a thirty-year marriage can now be a priority, or that a new chapter in life can begin for us all?

Isn't it time that "The Little Engine That Could" finally does?

Beverly Nadler Cammy
CEO of Domestic Operations,
Town of Mount Royal, Québec.

Where do I go for help? Inspirations Resource Page for special needs

Government and local resources for information and services

By Irene Phillips Miller

Office des personnes handicapées
Québec

The Office des personnes handicapées (OPHQ) du Québec is a government organization that ensures that the principles and rules set out in the Act to secure handicapped persons in the exercise of their rights with a view to achieving social, school and workplace integration are complied with, and that all organizations pursue their efforts towards the social participation of people with disabilities. The OPHQ carries out this mission through promotion, coordination, advising, and evaluation duties. In addition, it informs, advises, assists and represents people with disabilities and their families both on an individual and collective basis.

The OPHQ's website contains sections on the organization, its publications such as guides, e-bulletins, statistics and more, the obligations of public organizations, municipalities and the private sector in regards to the Act, its grant programs and special events, and links to other contributing websites or documents.

In order to assist persons with disabilities and their families in need of support the OPHQ's website also includes information on its services to individuals. For assistance, please call 1-800-567-1465 from anywhere in the province of Québec or write aide@ophq.gouv.qc.ca.

Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal
Québec

Santé Montréal and your local CSSS and CLSC

The Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal is the regional authority that oversees the organization of health and social services in the Montreal area. Its web portal has multiple search options with up-to-date information on:

- facilities, services or assistance
- a wide range of health care information

For more information visit http://www.santemontreal.qc.ca/en

Here is the list of CSSS's in Montréal:

- CSSS Cavendish
- CSSS d'Ahuntsic et Montréal-Nord
- CSSS de Bordeaux-Cartierville-Saint-Laurent
- CSSS de Dorval-Lachine-LaSalle
- West Island HSSC
- CSSS de la Montagne
- CSSS de la Pointe-de-l'Île
- CSSS de Saint-Léonard et de Saint-Michel
- CSSS du Coeur-de-l'Île
- CSSS du Sud-Ouest-Verdun
- CSSS Jeanne-Mance
- CSSS Lucille-Teasdale

Residents must enter their postal code to locate and access services from a CSSS or CLSC. A CSSS can offer services for medical emergencies, mental health, prevention and promotion programs (drugs, alcohol, gambling, domestic violence, sexual abuse, bereavement, healthy lifestyle habits etc.), services for intellectual and physical disabilities, loss of autonomy, and youth in difficulty. Each CSSS has its own administration and list of services dependent on the needs and priorities of its clientele in their territory.

Centre Communautaire RADISSON

The Centre Communautaire Radisson / Radisson Community Centre is a non-profit organization which offers daytime educational and cultural activities (life skills, social, cultural and leisure activities) to adults with severe physical disabilities. The centre focuses on empowerment, adult learning and peer tutoring to develop curiosity, the desire to learn and become a more active citizen with community awareness.

For information call 514-252-1671 or visit http://www.centreradisson.org.

ONROULEAUQUÉBEC
L'ACCESSIBILITÉ AU QUOTIDIEN

OnRouleAuQuebec is a non-profit organization which provides information and resources for persons with limited mobility. Their website provides access to information concerning residences, travel, resources, finance, transportation, local events and attractions in Quebec. There is a list of all the accessible restaurants and bars, beauty salons, massage therapists, sports, financial services, shopping locations. All of this information is meant to keep those with limited mobility in an active, healthy lifestyle and 'on the go'. For information visit http://onrouleauquebec.ca.

Vie autonome Independent Living Montréal

Independent Living Montreal (IL – M) believes in sustainable and inclusive communities, facilitating the development of one's potential and maintenance of one's healthy equilibrium, providing one with support in selecting their best options, and offering assistance to individuals with disabilities in maintaining connectedness through the use of technology. Their vision is to enable the full participation in society of people with disabilities through the provision of cross-disability services and the promotion of a more inclusive society within the greater Montreal area.

Managed by and for people with all types of disabilities, this non-profit charitable organization promotes independence and inclusion regardless of their disability. They offer bilingual services for self-development, skill acquisition, and access to information in both English and French. Their methods are participatory, democratic, innovative, and entrepreneurial.

For information contact www.va-m.org, phone: 514-288-1177 or email information@va-m.org. Open from Monday to Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. and from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m.

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centre ACTION centre

Living life without limits - bodies alive, minds healthy, spirits inspired

The Action Centre is a bilingual day centre in Montreal for those living with multiple physical disabilities. The mission of the centre is to provide structured activities that promote the social inclusion and active participation of adults with severe and permanent motor and/or cognitive limitations in a respectful caring environment. The four key program structures are: education, health and wellness, arts and crafts and community participation. The centre is open Monday through Friday offering activities such as: computer, arts and crafts, physical activities, cooking, parties, outings etc. For information visit http://www.centreaction.org or call 514-366-6868.

Curateur public
Québec

Public Curator's Office

The Quebec Public Curator's Office offers information and services for those who may become or who are incapacitated either mentally and/or physically. The purpose of this office is primarily to give protection to the incapacitated person and his or her property. Did you know that 42,000 individuals are the beneficiaries of a protection measure, either private or public curatorship or tutorship, and 2.2 million adults have prepared their mandates in case of incapacity. For more information on protective care, mandates and consent to care in the case of public protection please visit the website at http://www.curateur.gouv.qc.ca/cura/en/ or call 1-800-363-9020. If you wish to email the office you are required to fill out a form.

Nat Lauzon on hearing loss, radio, and life

By Wendy Singer and Nat Lauzon

Nat Lauzon is a popular Montreal radio deejay and entrepreneur who was 15 years old when she first noticed she had hearing loss. Her diagnosis is sensorineural hearing loss, the cause is genetic. Audiograms indicate that her loss is moderate to severe in high frequencies with a very slight difficulty in conversational speech.

Nat is currently focusing on her voiceover business *Speakable* while staying in touch with her Montreal fans on weekends at 92.5 The Beat. We asked her to share her thoughts on hearing loss and her career in radio.

How does hearing loss affect your daily life?

Fortunately, my hearing loss hasn't affected daily living too badly as my loss is in the higher frequencies. I have trouble distinguishing certain consonants and can't hear things like dripping taps, chirping birds, wind, phones ringing in other rooms. I also struggle to hear in crowded spaces or if people are not facing me when they speak. The voices of children and women can be tough because they are in the higher ranges. Needless to say, I love my loud-talker friends.

How did you feel as a teenager when you realized you had hearing loss?

It didn't bother me much until my 20s when I started missing bits of conversation. It's a bummer when you're the only one of your peer group that has a deficiency typically associated to older people.

Did you ever feel left out, different?

Sure, sometimes I felt sorry for myself and isolated (and still have my moments!) - but I certainly never felt excluded. When I was a kid, my mom, who started wearing hearing aids when she was 28-years-old, had a magnet on the fridge that read: 'I'm not hard of hearing, I'm ignoring you.' There has always been a certain levity about hearing impairment in my family and the acknowledgement that as a whole, we're a pretty healthy, long-lived bunch.

When did you decide that you wanted a career in radio?

I was 13 when I started in radio (my dad was also a radio deejay before I was born). I started at my community station in Northern Ontario and have been lucky enough to sustain a 25-year career in two major markets (Toronto and Montreal). I am incredibly grateful.

Nat Lauzon at work at The Beat 92.5

Are your colleagues aware of your hearing loss?

I have always been open about it with my coworkers and employers. I actually wish that hearing health had more of a presence in the radio business as there are many announcers with hearing loss as a result of excessive volume on headphones, etc.

Did you have to work harder at certain things in order to feel secure?

I don't think I worked harder because I have an impairment, but I DO think it forced me to broaden my horizons and look into other interests as income potential.

Over three years ago I left a full time radio career to be my own boss and start my own voiceover company (www.speakable.ca). It's still a sound-related job, but starting a business gave me a certain confidence and skill set that proved to me I can do other things if I put my mind to it. I have a few ideas cooking for other things I'd like to do. I think it's good to have Plan B. And C. And D! Why not?

What were the biggest hurdles to overcome?

I don't think I had more hurdles than anyone else. I think many times hurdles are self-manufactured and we blame others or even our own perceived deficiencies for not being where we want to be. Set a goal, make a plan, be kind along the way, keep learning. That seems to be a good formula for me.

Your thoughts on using hearing aids?

Hearing aids opened up a new layer of sounds that I haven't heard in a very long time! Hearing fades so slowly you don't even notice that you can't hear something, until suddenly - you CAN again! Conversation is a breeze. The technology is incredibly advanced! If you would buy glasses to improve your sight – why wouldn't you buy a hearing aid to improve your hearing?

What is your advice on having the courage to follow your dreams?

Sometimes, the amazing thing about being 'different' is that out of necessity, you may discover a new way to do something, or learn a new skill. That in turn, may help someone else in the same position. How on earth can that be a bad thing?

Are you concerned about further hearing loss preventing you from doing the work you love to do?

Yes - I DO worry that hearing loss will prevent me from doing the work I love. But, I have been coming to terms with that over a long period of time, which I suppose makes it easier to accept. Hearing loss is slow and can be unpredictable - so I really don't know if I can keep doing this for many years or just a few more. But isn't that really the bottom line for all of us? None of us knows what tomorrow holds. So, I'll appreciate what I have while I have it, while planning for my future. I'm not sure there's another way around it that doesn't involve stressing out over unknowns.

If you weren't doing radio/voice work, what would your second career choice be?

Definitely something to do with animals. I started a website a few years ago called www.montrealdogblog.com, featuring articles for pet-owners contributed by a team of local volunteer bloggers. Our ad dollars go back into animal rescue. It's really a labour of love.

You can listen to Nat Lauzon's show 'Feel Good Weekends' on 92.5 The Beat on Saturday and Sunday from 12:00 to 4:00 pm., and visit her website at natlauzon.com.

Nat Lauzon (Photo credit: Jimmy Hamelin)

We asked Nat about her favourite things:

Recording Artists:

All time favourites:
Crowded House, anything old school or 90s country (I'm a redneck at heart!)

Right now:
Bruno Mars and Ed Sheeran

Songs:

All time favourite:
Throw Your Arms Around Me by Hunters and Collectors

Right now:
Prayer in C by Lilly Wood & Robin Schulz, Not the Only One by Sam Smith

Television shows:

All time favourite:
Three's Company (Jack Tripper was my first crush!)

Right now:
Nashville, The Killing, and Arrested Development on Netflix

Actor/actress:

Tina Fey, Kevin Nealon, John C. Reilly, Bill Murray, Will Ferrell….

Learn, Share & Connect @ ALDI 2014

By Wendy Singer

ALDI (Advancing Learning in Differentiation and Inclusion) is a provincial project initiated and supported by the Directors General of the 10 English School Boards in Quebec. The project directly supports resource teachers and resource teams in their role as specialists in the field of special education within the English school boards in Quebec. With a broad focus on Universal Design for Learning (UDL), ALDI also offers support, innovative approaches and collaborative opportunities for classroom teachers, administrators, non-teaching professionals and technicians to enhance teaching and learning for students with special needs.

The ALDI annual symposium, spearheaded by Andrea Prupas (on behalf of ALDI), Diane Wood, Carol Marriot, and Julie Hobbs (on behalf of ASSET – Assisting School Systems in Educational Transformation), took place on October 8th and 9th at the Holiday Inn Pointe-Claire. It successfully provided attendees the opportunity to learn from an esteemed list of speakers and from each other, seek out new resources and initiatives, share and network.

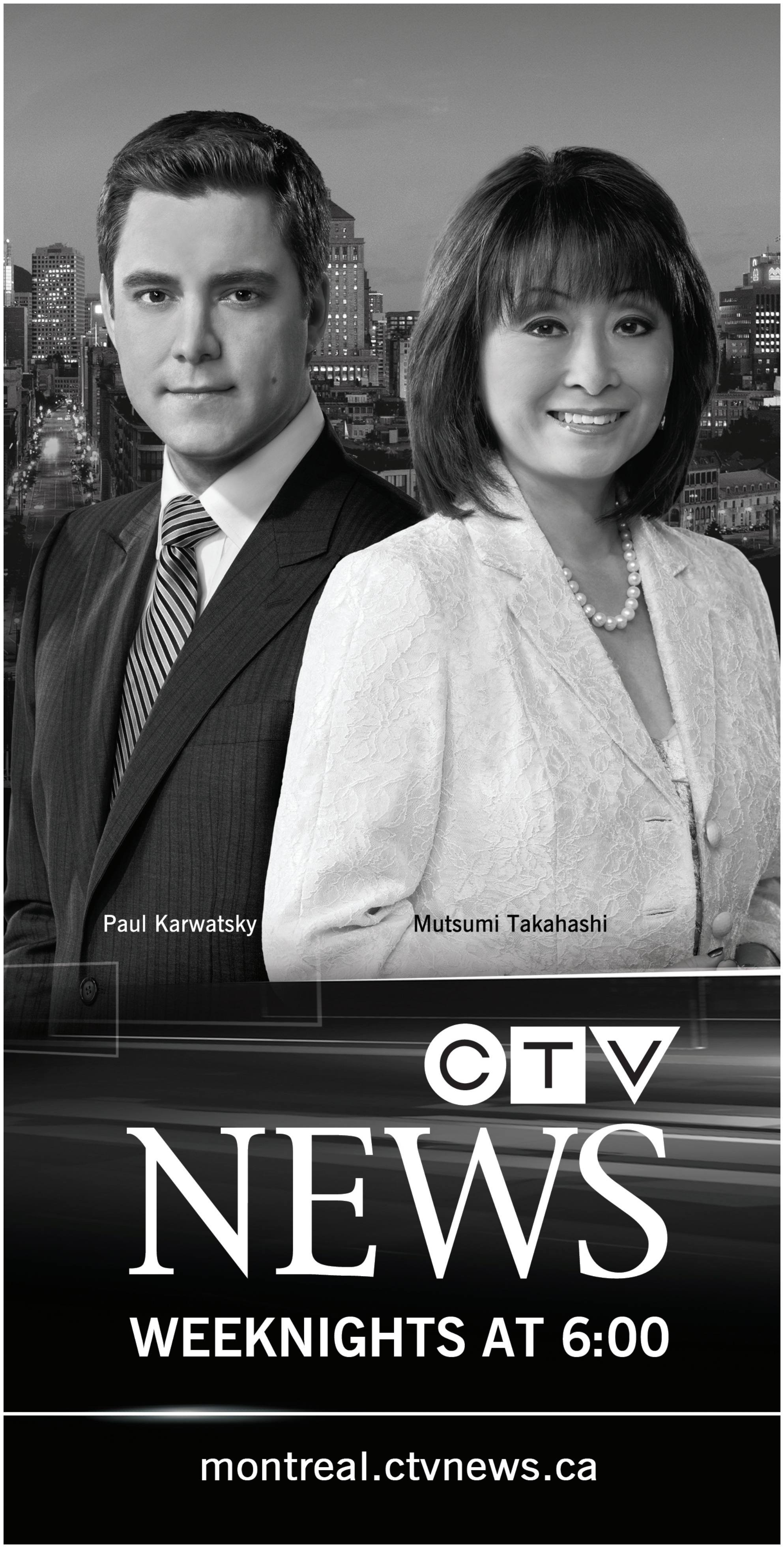
ALDI 2014 featured an exciting focus on math differentiation, brain-based learning and UDL. Presenters came from the English school boards of Quebec, universities and CEGEPS, and others from further afield. Sessions included keynote addresses from Amy Lin, Halton District School Board, who addressed A Visual Approach to Teaching Math Concepts; and Kathie Nunley, on A Student's Brain; How It Works.

We enjoyed Kathy Howery from the University of Alberta's presentation on The Why, What and How of Universal Design for Learning. Howery challenged her audience to think differently about addressing learner diversity. "What if we only made size eight shoes?" she asked. The response – we would all be having a difficult time walking. "Change comes from the margins," she added. "Not the average."

We were delighted to be amongst an impressive group of exhibitors, including FDMT and Scholastic. Having the opportunity to meet so many resource teachers is invaluable to our work here at Inspirations.

For information on ALDI, or to contact the project coordinator, visit: aldi.learnquebec.ca (web) or @ALDIQuebec (Twitter)

ALDI Symposium 2014 organizing committee Diane Wood, Julie Hobbs, Andrea Prupas, and Carol Marriot.



Grands projets à l'horizon dans l'ouest de l'île

Par Natalie Chapman

WIAIH est un organisme de charité qui, depuis 56 ans, œuvre pour le bien-être des personnes de tous âges ayant une déficience intellectuelle ou l'autisme.

En 2005, WIAIH s'est porté acquéreur d'un immeuble datant du début du siècle à Ste-Geneviève pour y loger leur Centre de développement Pat Roberts, un jardin d'enfants adapté. Cette année, le Conseil d'administration élabore de nouveaux plans qui ne manquent pas de susciter l'enthousiasme – pour agrandir l'immeuble afin de mieux servir les participants de WIAIH et l'ensemble de la collectivité.

D'abord et avant tout, les plans prévoient plus d'espace pour WIAIH : le nouveau bâtiment sera assez vaste pour accueillir un gymnase, un espace pour les familles, une salle multifonctionnelles et des salles de classe. En d'autres occasions, l'espace pourra servir pour des activités récréatives au bénéfice de participants plus âgés. Ainsi, le plan de l'immeuble sera conçu pour aménager une cuisine attrayante, beaucoup d'espace de rangement et des lieux où pourront se dérouler une multitude d'activités.

La communauté de Ste-Geneviève a également besoin d'un espace communautaire. Par conséquent, nous avons prévu de mettre ces lieux à la disposition de toutes les familles du secteur qui ont de jeunes enfants. Ce nouveau centre nous permettra de mettre en pratique la philosophie de WIAIH dans le meilleur intérêt de toutes les familles qui ont de jeunes enfants, que ces enfants vivent ou non avec un trouble du développement. Programmes de développement des compétences parentales, activités littéraires, cuisines communautaires, centres d'information et de référence – les possibilités sont sans limites! Et il existe déjà un réseau de centres comme cela à Québec, des organismes communautaires famille ou environ 90 000 familles trouvent chaque année conseils, solutions ou aide. L'importance d'un environnement de qualité pour tous les jeunes enfants et favorisant l'implication et l'information de leurs parents est prouvée et documentée.

Le secteur de Ste-Geneviève compte de nombreuses familles à ressources plutôt restreintes et qui n'ont pas beaucoup accès aux services de soutien. Ce nouveau centre pourra fournir les ressources et les informations dont ces familles ont un urgent besoin et donner tout son sens au vieil adage selon lequel « il faut une communauté pour élever un enfant ».

Le projet est encore sur la planche à dessins et rien n'est encore sûr, mais l'enthousiasme règne, c'est certain! L'aventure sera titanesque et nous aurons besoin du soutien de tous nos membres et de la communauté à chaque étape. Nous explorons toutes les possibilités de bâtir tous ensemble un univers communautaire. Un univers qui reposera sur le soutien social et le sentiment d'appartenance, où foisonneront les occasions d'apprendre et de vivre de nouvelles expériences, de partager nos ressources et les outils éducatifs dont nous avons besoin pour élever des enfants en santé et heureux.

Natalie Chapman est la Directrice générale de WIAIH.

Le programme Caribou

Le Programme Caribou a pour mission d'offrir des services d'intervention intensive spécialisée à des jeunes enfants présentant un trouble du spectre de l'autisme, d'autres troubles du développement ainsi qu'à ceux en attente de diagnostic. Dans un environnement chaleureux, nous offrons des programmes d'apprentissage basés sur les forces, les intérêts et la personnalité de chaque enfant. Nous basons nos interventions sur les principes du programme TEACCH ainsi que sur l'ABA et d'autres méthodes reconnues. Nos programmes visent le développement cognitif, social et moteur ainsi que les habiletés de communication et l'autonomie. Notre objectif est d'ainsi permettre à chaque enfant d'atteindre son plein potentiel. Pour des informations contacter 514-383-6006 ou intervention@autismecaribou.com, ou visitez www.autismecaribou.com.

Aider les jeunes ayant une limitation fonctionnelle à s'épanouir par le biais des saines habitudes de vie

Un jeune athlète du primaire participe à une compétition d'Athlétistme du Défi sportif AlterGo 2015. (credit photo : Dugraf)

Par Marina Le Chêne

Saviez-vous que 64 000 jeunes Québécois[1] ont une limitation fonctionnelle? Comme tous les enfants, ces jeunes ont besoin de bouger. C'est pourquoi il est important de savoir s'adapter à leur réalité. En pratiquant un sport collectif et/ou de manière autonome, les jeunes ayant une limitation fonctionnelle peuvent mieux atteindre leurs objectifs et développer un sentiment d'accomplissement qui influence leur estime de soi et leur motivation.

Chaque jour, il est possible de les encourager à prendre soin de leur santé et à adopter de saines habitudes de vie en ayant une alimentation équilibrée et en pratiquant une activité physique. Voici quelques idées.

Conseils pratiques pour les écoles

La mise en place de cours collectifs et adaptés d'éducation physique peut avoir un impact tant au niveau des relations sociales des jeunes, en leur permettant de développer un esprit d'équipe, que de leur santé physique.

Pour cela, vous pouvez essayer de diminuer la taille des groupes lors des cours d'activité physique, soit en réduisant le nombre de participants, soit en organisant la conduite des cours sous forme d'ateliers pour qu'il y ait un meilleur encadrement et suivi des jeunes. Il est aussi possible d'organiser des pratiques de sport collectif comme le basketball en fauteuil roulant. Le Défi sportif AlterGo met ses équipements sportifs à la disposition des écoles qui souhaitent organiser des activités d'initiation et de découverte de sports adaptés. Le prêt est gratuit et dure le temps que vous souhaitez.

Il peut également être utile de mettre en place des ateliers sur les saines habitudes alimentaires qui permettraient aux jeunes de se sociabiliser et de prendre goût par eux-mêmes aux aliments.

C'est un cercle vertueux. Plus les jeunes seront encouragés à pratiquer un sport, plus ils pourront sortir de l'isolement, car ils se retrouveront à jouer en équipe ou entourer de leur camarade lors du cours de sport. Le sentiment d'appartenance qu'ils en ressortiront leur donnera une meilleure confiance en eux et les aidera à se dépasser dans l'apprentissage de leurs études comme dans la vie de tous les jours.

Pour plus d'informations, consultez le site www.choisirdegagner.com.

Marina Le Chêne est agente de communication chez AlterGo.

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[1] *Institut de la statistique du Québec, Vivre avec une incapacité au Québec. Un portrait statistique à partir de l'Enquête sur la participation et les limitations d'activités de 2001 et 2006, 35 pages, novembre 2010.*

Triumphant Terry Fox

By Daniel Smajovits

Behind the scenes at Inspirations Newspaper is the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), and at the heart of any school board are its children. Recently, children at our board joined hundreds of thousands across Canada and participated in the Terry Fox Run.

The story of Fox, an international icon and hero to countless individuals, is well documented. Annually, schools at the EMSB and throughout the country take it upon themselves to continue his legacy and educate the youth on what Fox stood for and what he created through the Marathon of Hope.

Thirty-four years before the advent of the technology that propelled Oscar Pistorius to compete in the Summer Olympics alongside able-bodied competitors, Fox trekked 5,474 kilometers into the heart of Canada with a prosthetic that, while advanced for the time, was actually quite rudimentary. Iconic video of Fox limping with every step highlights the determination of Fox: his prosthetic was clearly not designed for anything other than walking.

Weighing in at four kilograms, the prosthetic attached to Fox's body with belts and suction. The leg was composed of plastic and metal, with the knee acting like a door hinge that went back and forth. Straps helped move the lower part of the leg, while the foot was built with a combination of wood and rubber.

Such a device could not have been comfortable in even ideal conditions, never mind those faced by Fox every day. Yet, it begs to ask the question: if Fox had been equipped with the technology that Pistorius and other athletes used today, would he have finished his Marathon of Hope?

Canadian Rick Ball currently holds the world record for the fastest single-leg amputee marathon at 2:57:47 (6:41 per mile). This mark is roughly 54 minutes slower than the able-bodied record.

Eddy Nolan participating in the Terry Fox run at Roslyn Elementary School.

One has to believe that, while running a marathon per day at Ball's pace would be incredibly difficult, keeping all the other variables of the Mararthon of Hope the same before the return of Fox's cancer – at a conservative estimate of a 13-minute mile, modern technology, coupled with his incredible dedication, he would have been able to reach the Pacific Ocean.

Association Sportive des Sourds du Québec (ASSQ)

Par Audrey Beauchamp

L'Association sportive des sourds du Québec (ASSQ) est un organisme provincial à but non lucratif reconnu par le ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS), dont l'objectif est de promouvoir le sport et l'activité physique chez les personnes sourdes et malentendantes du Québec. Nous sommes une ressource unique qui offre des programmes sportifs accessibles selon les besoins spécifiques de cette clientèle.

7e tournoi Invitation en janvier dernier – 11 janvier 2014. (Crédit photo : ASSQ)

Notre organisme supporte financièrement les athlètes sourds et malentendants qui veulent perfectionner leur entraînement pour participer à des compétitions de niveau national ou international. De plus, nous offrons des programmes sportifs et d'activités physiques pour encourager les personnes sourdes et malentendantes à être plus actives afin d'améliorer leur santé et leur bien-être.

Nos objectifs sont :

1. Supporter financièrement l'athlète qui veut perfectionner son entraînement en vue de compétitions (sourds) au niveau international.

2. Supporter financièrement l'athlète qui participe aux entraînements et/ou compétitions de niveau national.

3. Offrir des programmes sportifs ou d'activités physiques.

4. Supporter l'organisation d'un événement sportif qui se tiendra sur le territoire du Québec.

5. Supporter financièrement les équipes québécoises qui participeront à une compétition nationale.

6. Supporter financièrement l'athlète qui participe aux entraînements et/ou compétition de niveau provincial.

Deux catégories sont offertes aux personnes vivant avec une surdité : Participation à un évènement sportif financée par l'ASSQ; Participation à un programme sportif de l'ASSQ ou participation à un programme intégré avec les entendants dont l'interprète est fourni par l'ASSQ.

Visitez la section 'RÉCRÉATIF' de notre site internet www.assq.org pour en savoir plus à propos de notre programmation d'activités physiques.

Calendrier des événements sportifs à venir: Challenge Hivernal – Mars 2015 (Ski alpin et planche à neige), 18e Sourdlympiques d'hiver à Khanty-Mansiysk en Russie – 25 mars au 5 avril 2015, 8e Tournoi Invitation – 10 janvier 2015.

La tradition se maintient! Le 8e tournoi Invitation ASSQ aura lieu encore une fois toute la journée, le 10 janvier 2015, avec de la nouveauté au Cégep du Vieux-Montréal (255, rue Ontario Est, Montréal) tout près du métro Berri-UQAM.

Ce tournoi est le meilleur moyen de socialiser, rencontrer de nouvelles personnes sourdes et malentendantes provenant de différentes régions et surtout, de faire du sport tout en ayant beaucoup de plaisir!

Pour des informations veuillez contacter info@assq.org ou www.assq.org.

Audrey Beauchamp est la coordonnatrice des projets et des communications.

Power Picnic 2014 energizes participants

By Irene Phillips Miller

For the past eight years guests and volunteers have gathered together at the Île Bizard estate of humanitarian and philanthropist, Ginger Petty, for the annual 'Power Picnic'. The guests, caregivers and family members, are associated with the Muscular Dystrophy Association, the Multiple Sclerosis Society, the Action Centre Montreal located in Lasalle, and the Centre Communautaire Radisson located in Montreal East.

Guests arrived on Wednesday August 6, 2014 in buses, taxis, cars and golf carts in anticipation of a day filled with summer fresh air, fun and games, and a barbeque picnic lunch topped with a tasty ice cream bar.

What originated as a modest picnic with physically challenged guests, has now blossomed into a major event with over 265 guests and 75 volunteers (some from Vermont, Toronto and Port Hope), with everyone swarming the grounds in beehive fashion!

Suzanne Lyng Paulini former teacher at John Fisher Elementary School (standing), and her sister Louise departing the picnic wearing a smile. (Photo credit, Irene Phillips Miller)

When a city official asked Ginger Petty why she chooses to have such a large picnic on her private grounds, she replied in her inimitable manner, 'Why not?' The title, 'Power Picnic' was chosen because the picnic is meant to provide individuals with a boost of positive energy and inner power to provide a tinge of fuel for their life journey. Many of the guests have limited mobility and are often cooped up in institutions, residences and apartments in the crowded city.

This year's picnic was heralded by the 78th Squadron of the Fraser Highlanders with bagpipes, and a traditional Scottish sword dance by Marie Eve Valiquette, a native Francophone Quebecer who fell in love with Celtic culture, music and dance.

Two teams of volunteers, the PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) Team and the winning 'Run A Mok Team', entertained with howls of laughter during the 'Olympic Games', which included challenges like the Penguin Dash, and a Dippity Do Bath War, while Julie Lafontaine sang popular songs throughout the day.

The guests are not the only ones energized by the Power Picnic. Volunteers are buoyed by the gift of giving and the gift of receiving the joyful smiles and enthusiasm of the guests. 'Power' and 'empowerment' are popular 'buzz words' but the flip side of 'human vulnerability and frailty' are ever present in life's circumstances, which makes us all interdependent on one another, not only to survive but to thrive. We all depend on the goodwill of one another, and 'Why not?'

The Action Centre is a bilingual and multicultural non-profit community organization that provides structured activities that promote the social inclusion and active participation of adults with severe and permanent motor and/or cognitive limitations (www.centreaction.org). Le Centre communautaire Radisson est un organisme à but non lucratif offrant des activités éducatives et culturelles à des adultes ayant une déficience physique (www.centreradisson.org).

For more information about these resources visit the Inspirations Resource Page on page 9 of this edition.

The Accessibility Icon Project: A shift from 'handicapped' to 'accessible'

By Wendy Singer

The blue and white 'handicapped' symbol that alerts us to the location of accessible areas, from parking lots to washrooms, currently depicts a stagnant wheelchair user.

A grassroots effort that began in Boston, which had the original intent of opening up a discussion about the limitations of this symbol, has given birth to The Accessible Icon Project.

It all began as a public street campaign in 2009, when co-founders Sara Hendren and Dr. Brian Glenney started talking about how the handicapped sign symbolized a robotic, lifeless person who did not represent people with disabilities accurately. Feeling that the symbol reinforced themes of passivity and non-human qualities, the two felt the sign was not communicating individual movement.

Wishing to highlight the limitations of the current symbol and its machine-link qualities, the two artists, with the help of many graffiti artists, stuck 1,000 transparent orange stickers around the city of Boston that emphasized action.

Billy Baker from the Boston Globe recognized their art campaign and wrote an article that brought greater attention to the artists' efforts. When the community responded with positive feedback, the artists realized that people were not interested in just discussing the limitations of the current symbol, but wanted a new symbol all together. This drove Dr. Glenney and Hendren back to the drawing board to create a symbol that could be recognizable and adopted.

The result is in a new 'accessible' design that depicts an active, in-motion person using a wheelchair.

The state of New York is the first to require all new and replacement signage used to signify accessibility for people with disabilities to include the new, active accessibility symbol. The state will also replace the word 'handicapped' with 'accessible'.

According to Shaun Heasley's report in the July 28, 2014 edition of Disability Scoop, the shift is about more than aesthetics. He states that New York Governor Andrew Cuomo said the following in signing New York's new legislation: "This bill is an important step toward correcting society's understanding of accessibility and eliminating a stigma."

New York City and a smattering of other locales, businesses and schools have already begun using the new symbol, known as the 'Accessible Icon'. I spotted it in use at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City this summer. The Accessible Icon is also on display at the MOMA (Museum of Modern Art) as part of an exhibit about culturally relevant designs developed in recent decades.

Next stop, Canada?

For information visit http://www.accessibleicon.org/icon.html.

The new accessibility icon created by The Accessibility Icon Project.

Crestview C.A.R.E.S.: A parents' support group in the making

By Marie-Helen Goyetche

The creation of a parents' support group named Crestview C.A.R.E.S. initially came about to bring parents with special needs children together. Very few parent support groups exist in Laval, and more specifically, there are even fewer offered in English.

As the principal of Crestview Elementary School (Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board), the need and the importance of having such a group for parents at our school was both imperative and evident. For over a year and a half, parents who would pick up their children from school would show up earlier and earlier just to see and talk to each other. They would share stories, make referrals and give advice based on their own experiences. Their inside joke was to create an in-house coffee restaurant so parents could hang out at the school and spend time with each other.

The idea of Crestview C.A.R.E.S. stemmed from those daily encounters. Why not offer the parents one evening a month where they could come to school (without their children, perfect time for a little respite) have a coffee or two and meet with parents sharing the same dilemmas as them? Why not have them build a network for other parents? Who is the best person to give references and share resources? In fact, it is the parents themselves. With a cost-free location to meet, Laval Families quickly came on board to sponsor the meetings by offering coffee and treats. Now all we needed were parents. On January 29, 2013, Crestview C.A.R.E.S. held its first meeting.

Meeting face-to-face was the only logical way to create the parents' support group. It was deemed more meaningful and ensured personal interaction. Even though children have different needs, all parents need to have the opportunity to share, ask questions, laugh and cry with other parents living through the same situations.

The C.A.R.E.S. in Crestview C.A.R.E.S. was developed by a few parents when discussing the importance of this parents support group and what they wanted to get out of it.

C: Making Connections

A: For Another – learning from one another

R: Resources - sharing resources amongst themselves and sharing their golden nuggets

E: Establishing supportive friendships and sharing experiences

A meeting of the Crestview C.A.R.E.S. group. (Photo credit, Marie-Helen Goyetche)

S: Sharing strategies

Being the parent of a child with special needs doesn't have to be done alone. We are pleased to welcome parents with children with special needs that come from other schools.

Currently. Crestview C.A.R.E.S. invites special guest speakers to the monthly meeting. After the talk, parents have the opportunity to interact with each other.

Watch for us on Facebook, in the Laval Families community online section and ensure to mark your calendars – the last Thursday of each month – at Crestview. 750 Devonshire, Chomedey, Laval. Because Crestview cares!

For information email mhgoyetche@swlauriersb.qc.ca.

Marie-Helen Goyetche is the Principal of Crestview Elementary School.

Autistic woman makes an impact in her community

By Marla Cable

Ann Crabtree is a 69-year-old Deaf Autistic woman who was diagnosed with autism in the 1960's in Montreal during a time when not only the diagnosis but also the word 'autism' was foreign to the general public and many doctors.

Ann grew up in Montreal and Lake Placid not really understanding or having an awareness of her diagnosis. During her childhood she attended several schools, both regular and special needs, including The Mackay Center.

In her attempts to understand her own diagnosis, Ann has developed her personal opinion about autism. She believes that while an autistic person faces many challenges, autism is essentially a difference. A difference meant not to cure, but rather to support the individual in their challenges, by using their strengths so that they can be as independent as possible.

Ann has many messages to give to parents and professionals on how to support autistic children. She believes that autistic learning is lifelong. A second message Ann wants to share is about sensory overload. "I do not think non-autistics realize how challenging sensory input is and how it impacts emotions, physical well-being, and communication."

Ann's mission has become to support children with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis. She volunteers at a daycare program and at Giant Steps School (a school for children, teens and young adults with an ASD). At Giant Steps, she gives feedback to the staff and has made a huge impact on both the staff and students.

By sharing her life stories, thoughts and feelings, Ann strives to change attitudes about autism and impact parents, professionals and those on the spectrum. Her main message is, "Let them be kids, enjoy the moments. Get down and see what they are seeing and experiencing. It will create a strong relationship connection and a lasting memory."

Ann Crabtree will be speaking to parents and professionals on Tuesday February 10, 2015 at 10:30 a.m. at Giant Steps School. If you are interested in attending, please contact Marla Cable at 514-935-1911 x 237 or mcable@giantstepsmontreal.com to reserve your place.

Ann Crabtree on an excursion at Parc Safari with Giant Steps School. (Photo credit, Marla Cable)

Marla Cable is the coordinator of the Giant Steps Resource and Training Centre.

Une artiste asperger engagée pour la cause des autistes

« De ma nature hyper-sensible émerge une intuition, une émotion liée à une perception abstraite qui me pousse à la création. »

Par Lucila Guerrero

Née au Pérou où elle a grandi, en même temps que son intérêt vers l'art, Lucila Guerrero a trouvé dans l'informatique une grande passion qui l'a suivie pendant 15 ans.

C'est en 2004 qu'elle découvre la photographie et elle devient tout de suite fascinée par cet outil qui lui permettait de s'exprimer et de montrer sa vision de son monde intérieur et extérieur. Son apprentissage a été empirique et passionné.

« Dans mon œuvre, je peux trouver mon inspiration dans la beauté de la simplicité et dans tout le visuel qui me fascine ou dans mes questionnements profonds et ma quête du sens. »

« Je conçois mes œuvres artistiques pour représenter mes interactions et ma vision particulière du monde : le paradoxal, l'absurdité ou l'illogisme dans les échanges humaines. »

En 2007 elle commence à partager ses photos dans des communautés internet et elle reçoit de plus en plus des reconnaissances. À la même époque, quand elle découvre l'esprit autistique de son fils, sa vie est détournée de son cours pour aller en quête d'une réponse pour elle même. Dans ces moments difficiles de solitude, d'incertitude, d'introspection et de questionnement, elle trouve un brin de lumière dans sa source d'harmonie émotive: la photographie.

Lors qu'elle a reçu l'attestation de sa propre nature autistique (Syndrome d'Asperger), elle reprend sa vie d'une façon différente, notamment plus solide. Tournant décisif en 2011, elle décida de faire de son art son activité de vie.

« Passionnée de la photographie et de l'informatique j'ai découvert à travers le jumelage de ces deux médiums la possibilité de concrétiser mes rêveries et l'irréel qui se développe au profond de mon imagination. Touchant le cliché original ou la première esquisse, je dessine, je peins, je colle ou je crée des textures, des dégradés, des flous et des effets qui pourront se mêler aux contrastes, aux déformations ou à toute une variété de changements avant de devenir l'œuvre. »

Elle participe dans des nombreuses expositions individuelles ou collectives et des événements culturels dans le milieu local et international. En 2013 elle a publié le livre « Lundi, je vais être Luka », une histoire autobiographique qui propose une réflexion sur la diversité.

Artiste clairement engagée à la défense de la diversité, Lucila Guerrero est aussi conférencière et cofondatrice de Aut'Créatifs, un mouvement de personnes autistes pour la reconnaissance positive de l'être autiste.

« Mon art propose une contemplation sur le respect à l'être humain comme individu unique, la diversité et l'influence enrichissante qu'elle pourrait ajouter à notre évolution personnelle et sociale. »

Lucila Guerrero.
(cédit photo: Luka-Cruz-Guerrero)

Lucila Guerrero est une auteure, artiste en art visuel et créatrice numérique.

Le site web de Lucila Guerrero: www.lucilaguerrero.com

Le site web de Aut'Créatifs : www.autcreatifs.com

Sexual education for adolescents and young adults with Asperger's Syndrome

By Dr. Isabelle Hénault

There is remarkably little research and clinical knowledge on the sexual understanding and profile of adults with Asperger's Syndrome (AS). One hundred thirty-one subjects living in Canada, Australia, France, Denmark and the United States completed The Derogatis Sexual Functioning Inventory (DSFI; Derogatis and Melisaratos, 1982). The DSFI examines a range of aspects related to sexuality including knowledge and experience, desire, attitudes, affect, role, fantasies, body image and general sexual satisfaction. It provides a comprehensive assessment of behaviour and attitudes relevant to sexuality.

The results suggest that individuals with AS have levels of sexual interest and drive comparable to those of the general population. On the other hand, the communication difficulties that they experience combined with their lack of social skills serves to increase the likelihood that symptoms of depression and inappropriate socio-sexual behaviours will appear (Hénault, Attwood & Haracopos, 2010).

Such individuals need understanding and support from their partner, family, friends and relationship counselling agencies. The remedial programs on social cognition, particularly in the areas of friendship skills and empathy that begin in early childhood, continue as the person matures to include information and guidance on puberty, dating, sexual knowledge and identity and intimacy. The goal is to provide greater knowledge and positive experiences to contribute to better decision making and self-esteem.

The goal of the intervention is to both provide a structure for appropriate sexual behaviours and offer many opportunities for learning and obtaining enriching experiences.

The following themes, which are adapted to the reality of adolescents and adults with AS cover as a whole, the characteristics linked to their social and sexual development (Hénault, 2006):

-Body changes

-The value of, and stages involved in making decisions: notion of informed consent

-Intimacy

-Sexual health and hygiene

-Communication: interpersonal, intimate, love, and friendly relationships

-The effect of alcohol and drugs on sexuality

-Sexual relations and other sexual behaviours

-Sexual orientation and identity

-Condoms, contraception, and the prevention of sexually transmitted infections (STI's)

-Friendship: recognition of abusive/unfriendly relationships

-Dangerous relationships: age difference, intention, bullying, aggression

-Qualities of a healthy relationship: sharing,

(Continued on Page 17)

Helping hands on campus: CROM and CEGEP André-Laurendeau celebrate 10 years of collaboration

By Nathalie Tétrault and Wendy Singer

The West Montreal Readaptation Centre (WMRC or CROM) services people with an intellectual disability (ID), autism spectrum disorder (ASD) or pervasive developmental disorder (PDD).

Several Montreal CEGEPs and universities, including Concordia, McGill, John Abbott College and Vanier College, welcome supervised groups of CROM clients to work on their campuses. Tasks include cleaning, recycling, serving food in the cafeteria, shredding documents, and more.

CROM educators Patrizia Iaconessi and Rosetta Tucci lead one such group of 21 adult clients at Cégep André-Laurendeau in Lasalle. This year marked the 10th anniversary of the program at this location, and there was much to be celebrated.

Iaconessi and Tucci, along with teacher Anne-Marie Leclerc from the Contact Program at Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys, form a tight-knit team that manages each client's experience. Weekly schedules are created using Velcro pictograms for flexibility and comprehension. Assessments are done every two years to evaluate the client's interests and goals, and work tasks are tailored to meet their skills and desires. This dynamic duo make sure to inject fun into their clients' lives through their work and planned group outings that foster friendships.

Creative and friendly marketing and rigourous sensitization have been the key to the program's success. "We knock on a lot of doors, and let the CEGEP staff here know that we are willing to do anything," says Iaconessi. "The best public relations is our clients. They have broken down the barriers and let the staff and students know how friendly and helpful they are."

This knocking has led to interesting and unexpected collaborations. CROM clients, who currently range in age from 25 to 59, assist the Nursing Department with cleaning tasks. In exchange, Nursing students make requisite presentations to the group on topics like personal hygiene, nutrition and sexuality. The CROM group is responsible for starting the recycling program at the CEGEP.

The energy and passion that the Iaconessi-Tucci team bring to the program is contagious. A tour through the CEGEP in their presence includes warm 'hellos' and welcomed chats from staff member whose paths they cross.

Les employés et les étudiants du Cégep André-Laurendeau sont des partenaires remarquables en tout point de vue. Les usagers du CROM profitent d'un milieu de vie stimulant et participent aux activités sociales et culturelles, ce qui permet aux usagers, aux employés et aux étudiants d'établir des liens et amitiés durables. Cette intégration a fait fleurir un sentiment de fierté, de solidarité et d'appartenance chez les usagers puisqu'ils contribuent pleinement à la vie et au bien-être de tous et qu'ils ont l'occasion d'acquérir de nombreuses compétences. Les étudiants sont nos adultes et meneurs de demain ; ces rencontres et amitiés changeront à tout jamais leur regard sur la déficience et mèneront sans aucun doute vers une société plus juste, ouverte, aimante et tolérante.

The CROM client group with Patrizia Iaconessi and Rosetta Tucci at Cégep André-Laurendeau in Lasalle.

WMRC provides habilitation, rehabilitation, residential and community integration services in English and French to more than 800 children and close to 1,000 adults. For information contact infocrom@ssss.gouv.qc.ca.

(Continued from Page 16)

communication, pleasure, interest, respect

-Social skills: presentation, interactions, reciprocity, sharing, etc.

In conclusion, sexual education has both short and long-term goals. On the short term, it allows adaptive sexual behaviours to emerge with respect to communication, emotions, and interpersonal relationships. Over the longer term, adolescents and adults with AS will be in a better position to understand what interpersonal relationships consist of and will engage in appropriate behaviours in a variety of relationship contexts. Finally, these individuals will understand what is meant by informed consent in the context of a sexual relationship. The ultimate goal is to allow individuals with AS to fully experience social integration, healthy sexuality and access a better quality of life.

Dr. Isabelle Hénault, is a sexologist and psychologist from the University of Québec at Montréal. Her practice and studies have focused on providing diagnosis, education and support to children, adolescents, adults and couples living with Autism and Asperger's Syndrome. Dr. Hénault has developed a relationship and sex education program, and works with individuals and groups to increase their understanding of sexuality, and conducts relationship counselling. She is the author of Asperger's Syndrome and Sexuality: From Adolescence through Adulthood, published by Jessica Kingsley Publisher, London (2005) and co-author of The Autism Spectrum, Sexuality and the Law (Attwood, Hénault & Dubin) published by Jessica Kingsley Publisher, London (2014). For information contact Clinique Autisme & Asperger de Montreal at http://www.clinique-autisme-asperger-mtl.ca/index.php or dr.isabellehenault@gmail.com.

Eating Disorders: Prevention is key

Part 2 of 2

By Despina Vassiliou, Ph. D.

Suspecting that a child has an eating disorder often results in a great deal of stress and worry for a parent who has recognized the warning signs (discussed in Eating Disorders, Part 1 in the Fall 2013 / Winter 2014 edition of Inspirations). What is a parent to do?

The issues and concerns you have as a parent are best dealt with by addressing them with your child. Some important steps can be taken. First, carve out a time to discuss the issue with your child. When selecting the time it should be when you and your child are both free and not rushed. Further, important discussions such as these should not follow arguments. As a parent, we should be calm and ready to listen. Second, listening is a critical part of the process. Children need to feel heard, as we all do. However, as parents or the adults in children's lives, we most often want to "fix" their problems for them. We often make the mistake of speaking more than listening. Taking the time to listen and let your child do more of the talking would be of great benefit.

When undergoing the discussion with your child it would be helpful to take a moment and a deep breath to reflect on the fact that your child is behaving the way he or she is because of the distress he or she is experiencing. The behaviours associated with eating disorders typically reflect an ineffective or inappropriate coping mechanism. This is the way the child is trying to deal with his or her experience of uncomfortable feelings.

Further, confrontation and judgment will likely result in denials and a deterioration of the parent-child relationship. Denial is often an embedded component of an eating disorder. Therefore, be open and ready to hear anything your child has to share with you and take a pause before reacting.

Doing some research before having the discussion may be helpful for both parent and child. Acquiring some knowledge of eating disorders can help foster a better understanding of what the child is experiencing. It is also important to note that the child may receive many compliments when he or she first loses the weight.

The most critical response a parent should take in a situation where an eating disorder is suspected is to contact the family doctor, who then will likely refer you to a specialist. Please keep in mind that eating disorders require specific types of interventions and an effective treatment plan will include the entire family in the process and not only the affected child.

If you suspect your child has an eating disorder please consult a medical professional.

Sources:

Dr. Clare Roscoe, Understanding Eating Disorders (May 2013) Ottawa Ontario.

www. cheo.on.ca

www.douglas.qc.ca

Despina Vassiliou is a psychologist at the English Montreal School Board.

Get moving!

By Claudia De Luca, Megan Silverhart, Amanda Vivona, and Ann Zilberbrant

Children's fitness levels have significantly deteriorated since 1981. In general, children today run slower, are weaker, and less flexible than their parents were 30 years ago. According to current statistics, over 50 percent of Canadian children aged five to 17 years are not meeting the criteria for optimal growth and development.

More specifically, "muscular strength and flexibility have decreased and all measures of [body fat] have increased" (Stats Canada, 2014). In 2009, a study found that over 20 percent of Montreal children are overweight. Excess body weight and obesity are associated with greater risk of heart disease, type II diabetes, and certain cancers, and may also lead to social and psychological problems, isolation, stigmatization, and poor self-esteem. Children with motor challenges associated with autism, developmental delays and motor disorders have an even greater risk of developing these problems.

Obesity in childhood is likely to continue in to adulthood and a lack of physical activity is among the leading contributors. The Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines suggest that children aged five to 11 participate in 60 minutes of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily. Research has found that only five percent of children are meeting this recommendation. Children today lead more sedentary lives as compared to 20 years ago, primarily due to the evolution of technology. Research indicates that children's "play" has changed from being outdoors to indoors and includes about six hours per day of "screen time" (e.g. interactive white board, tablets, computers, televisions).

Schools and families share the responsibility of providing a supportive and motivating environment to facilitate physical activity. In Quebec, the Ministry of Education recommends 120 minutes per week of Physical Education (Phys. Ed.). Substantial evidence shows that physical activity improves a child's academic function, but with increased curricular demands and emphasis on academic achievement, enhancing levels of physical activity is not always a primary concern.

With children spending seven to 10 hours within the school environment each day, physical activity should not be limited to Phys. Ed. Teachers can schedule regular movement breaks throughout the day, e.g. a cluster of exercises or a dance done in class, a walk through the school or school yard. Daily tasks beyond the classroom (e.g. bringing messages to the office, helping the caretaker collect recycling, accompany younger children to classes, etc.) are simple ways that can get kids moving in a meaningful way and feel more connected to their school.

Whether the child is at recess, daycare or at home, activities such as target games, silly relay races, obstacle courses, cooperative and/or social games can offer students a variety of ways to get moving. Some children may show more interest in larger group activities such as Yoga, Zumba, Dance, or Martial Arts. Regardless of the environment, it is strongly recommended to consider children's interests and abilities when encouraging them to be active.

Parents can be excellent role models by being active with their children. Taking breaks from technology and going for scheduled walks, bike rides, can be just what the doctor ordered. When at the playground, children should be encouraged to climb, swing, and run provided equipment is safe and secure. It doesn't require enrolment in organized sports (e.g. soccer, hockey, etc.). Competitive sports are not suitable for all children, particularly children with motor or coordination difficulties as they may not feel confident in their skills.

Being physically active doesn't require much cost, but rather an interest and a little imagination. Ultimately, children who find enjoyment in being physically active will continue to be active, regardless of their fitness level.

Claudia De Luca, Megan Silverhart, Amanda Vivona, and Ann Zilberbrant are occupational therapists at the EMSB.


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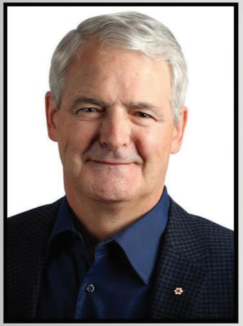

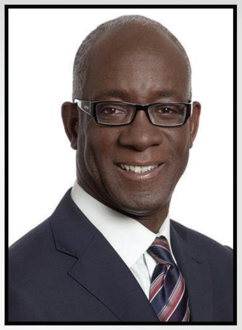


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The English Montreal School Board is proud to have been the initiator of Inspirations, a snapshot of our special needs community.

Angela Mancini Chairman

Robert Stocker Director General

Congratulations to our Student Services Department and the Communications and Marketing Division for showing the vision to introduce such an extraordinary publication to our educational landscape.

Commission scolaire English-Montréal
English Montreal School Board

AÉROPORTS DE MONTRÉAL

Montréal–Trudeau airport:

Sensitizing children with autism spectrum disorders and their families

By Wendy Singer

Last April, 100 children, accompanied by family members, had an opportunity to become acquainted with a typical traveller's journey through an airport, starting with arrival at the terminal parking lot, right up until the aircraft boarding and passenger-safety announcement. This opportunity came about through the Montréal–Trudeau Airport's Premium Kids Program, which organizes airport process familiarization days for children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) or functional limitations.

"Following the success of the pilot project and the positive comments we received, we decided to make this an annual program," said Christiane Beaulieu, Vice-President, Public Affairs and Communications, Aéroports de Montréal (ADM). "This activity is important for the families, but also for ADM. It enables us to better identify the needs and expectations of the families, and in this way we can improve our services to airport users."

ADM is Canada's first airport authority to introduce such a program, which is inspired by a similar initiative, Wings for Autism, created more than three years ago by the Charles River Center in collaboration with the Massachusetts Port Authority Logan International Airport, Boston.

For his part, Jean-François Lemay, General Manager of event partner Air Transat, said: "Preparing children for the experience of flying is essential for a successful family trip. This step is all the more important for parents of children with an ASD. That is why we are pleased to be the official partner airline of the Premium Kids Program." Mr. Lemay added: "Our priority is to offer our passengers an exceptional, pleasant and safe experience, no matter their limitations. Air Transat provides an extensive range of information services to families travelling aboard its flights and Premium Kids is a natural extension of this."

This event is organized by ADM jointly with the following partners: Autisme et troubles envahissants du développement Montréal (ATEDM), the Giant Steps organization, Special Olympics Québec, Air Transat, Transport Canada, the Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA), the Canadian Air Transport Security Authority (CATSA), Securitas, HMSHost, Sweet Factory, Runway Duty Free and the Montréal Airport Marriott Hotel.

Premium Kids Program attendees enjoy seeing the cockpit of a plane while being sensitized to the airport. (Photo courtesy of Aéroports de Montréal)

Congratulations to all involved parties for taking the initiative in this first step in making Montreal an autism-friendly city.

The next airport process familiarization day will take place on Saturday, November 29, 2014. For information about the program visit EnPremiere@admtl.com, or visit www.admtl.com.

Hate Mail by Monique Polak addresses autism in the classroom

By Dana Kobernick

When Monique Polak agreed to be writer-in-residence at Riverdale High School (Lester B. Pearson School Board), as part of the *Libres comme l'art* program, she was sure that she would be providing feedback to students on their writing. What she discovered, however, was that this unique initiative, made possible by the Blue Metropolis Literary Foundation, the *Conférence régionale des élus de Montréal*, and the *Conseil des Arts de Montréal*, meant that she would be writing a book with the help and input from the students.

She was given certain parameters: the book had to address the issues of autism and depression. And she was given Karen Scott's grade 9 English class. Monique pitched several ideas to the students but they nixed them all. It was student Hamzah Bashir Ahmad who mentioned a recent news story about an anonymous hate letter sent to the family of a child with autism, and it was that incident which ultimately served as the inspiration for the novel.

And so began the writing journey, which culminated in the publication of *Hate Mail*, the story of Todd, new to the high school that his cousin Jordie attends. Todd has autism and has not been accepted by his classmates, or by Jordie, who does everything to dissociate himself from his cousin. *Hate Mail* aims to break down stigma and "examines the transformative power of speaking out against prejudice."

Ms. Scott's students were true collaborators in creating *Hate Mail*. Throughout the writing process, Monique met with them seven times and would read the chapters that she had written. They would provide their comments, offer up their ideas and, together, they would work through problems that Monique was encountering with the story. Monique, the class and the student teacher, all conducted research for the book. "I never had so much fun working on a book," she said. "I never usually get this kind of interaction."

Hate Mail is dedicated to David Riverin, a friend of Monique's, avid reader of her books, and a student at John Grant High School (English Montreal School Board). When asked why it is important that this story be told, David, who has autism, said, "It is important to know that people with autism are different but not in a bad way."

The students were proud to have been such an integral part of *Hate Mail*. Fahad Elsabawi stated, "It was fun to come up with ideas and work together as a team. We always left with knowledge that we may not have learned in a regular classroom. We not only learned about autism but also… about the writing process." Kiara West-Philippeaux recognized the significance of the opportunity saying, "We are privileged to have been able to help out with the book."

Hamzah Bashir Ahmad, Monique Polak and Karen Scott at the launch of Monique Polak's book Hate Mail. (Photo credit, Dana Kobernick)

Dana Kobernick is a communications specialist and writer and is currently working on her first novel.

The 60 Second Fix: Feeling good has never been so easy

By Alison Reichert

Stress can make us feel overwhelmed, lead to below average health and to poor well-being. However, there is an easy breathing technique you can do a few times a day to make yourself feel great. There is a mass of brain-research to support the effectiveness of breathing techniques to improve the stress level of all of us. The physiological effects of stress can be detrimental, but when we practice breathing techniques, relaxation methods and visualisation we can reverse the negative effects of stress.

It is not a surprise to any parent or teacher that the students in our classrooms are stressed. They have demands that they are trying to meet from school, home, sports and friends. At the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) we have begun teaching breathing and visualization techniques to our staff and students, which have proven to be very effective. With the practical strategies of Dr. Reggie Melrose, the teachers are able to use this technique, called The 60 Second Fix in their classrooms to focus their students and improve their academic performance.

Dr. Melrose's 60 Second Fix can bring self-awareness and relief to students. Forest Hill Junior Elementary and Senior Elementary have taken on the technique school wide. Each teacher uses it with his/her class daily. They have found extraordinary gains in the students' self-awareness, attention and their ability to self-regulate their emotions. Sylvie Monette (Principal of Forest Hill Senior Elementary) says that the students learning the 60 Second Fix in their classroom have taught their family members the technique at home and continue to report that it helps them feel lower levels of anxiety and less stressed.

St. Edmund Elementary School's grade 1 teachers have been using the 60 Seconds in their classes for the past year. The students have seen amazing improvements ranging from the ability to concentrate on their work for much longer periods to feeling calm and in control. They have made a video of their class doing the 60 seconds, to view it visit: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P7WVNsPD1Nw.

You may be wondering what the 60 Second Fix is? It is simple: there are five steps to follow:

1. Feel your feet on the floor
2. Feel the support underneath you, the chair, the wall, the ground.
3. Breathe in through your nose
4. Visualize a soothing nature scene
5. Most importantly, notice how you are feeling and what is happening inside your body.

For more information visit: http://www.the60secondsfix.com/ and http://drmelrose.com/.

Alison Reichert is a consultant for special needs at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

The Long Way Home: Monique's journey with visual impairment

By Claude Beaulieu

Can you imagine a greater challenge than coming into the world and having to learn almost everything in just five years. Amazingly, we have all done it – managing it before kindergarten!

Now, imagine being thirty-something and having to do it over again.

Monique Morin and her beloved late guide dog Keiko. (Photo courtesy of Monique Morin)

Monique Morin was 32 when she was diagnosed with retinitis pigmentosa. "It hit me in the face," Monique says of receiving the news. "I started to feel like I was given a life sentence with no parole. Solitary confinement in the dark." She was living in Toronto at the time, with few resources. Even when Monique moved back home to Montreal, she had no family support structure to speak of. But she was not completely alone.

Monique, working in the financial services sector, was fortunate to have an understanding and accommodating employer who dedicated considerable resources to re-inventing her job and redesigning her work environment so she could continue to contribute and be productive. But first things first:

Soon upon returning to Montreal, where she continues to live alone, Monique was contacted by the Montreal Association for the Blind. The MAB steered her toward the resources she would need to begin her re-education. Her employer, 'Dynamic Funds', gave her the time she would need – five years – to rediscover the world and her place in it. She trained intensively for daily living activities like organizing a home, cooking and housecleaning. She also took a year-and-a-half of mobility training, two years of braille, several months of training in the handling of guide dogs and one year of computer skills. When she finally returned to work, Monique had to learn a new environment, not to mention a new job description. And for good measure, she learned to work a sewing machine, and now makes most of her own clothes.

Monique hopes to inspire both the visual and the visually-impaired. "We're productive people," she says. "We have value. We can contribute to society."

But for all her wry wit and her indomitable spirit, Monique can break down. She is in mourning for her long-time assistant and dearest friend – her beloved guide dog, Keiko. The ten-year old German shepherd died of cancer about six months ago. "It's hard to live without her," Monique says through tears. But she soon regains her composure. "We go forward," she says, "thinking there are no limits to what we can do."

Monique is currently on a waiting list for a new guide from the Fidelco Guide Dog Foundation.

Dynamic Funds employees Monique Morin and Geneviève Perez. (Photo credit, Claude Beaulieu)

Claude Beaulieu is a freelancer specializing in Copywriting and Translation. You can connect with Claude at ca.linkedin.com/in/claudebeaulieu/.

Inspirations Notebook

Wendy Singer

Rita McDonough (left) with Cindy Finn. (Photo credit, Marie-Eve Claude)

The Quebec English School Boards Association (QESBA) recently created an awards program to recognize excellence in public education. Congratulations to The Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) which was bestowed the Community Engagement Award for the work of the Family and School Support and Treatment Team (FSSTT).

Created in 1995, the FSSTT supports students with social-emotional and behavioural difficulties. Housed within Student Services, the FSSTT is comprised of full-time behaviour technicians, the school resource team and school board professionals. This team engages in collaborative problem solving to help students in difficulty.

According to **Cindy Finn**, Director of Student Services at LBPSB, everyone involved in the student's life is considered to be a contributing member of the treatment team and part of the intervention plan. Interventions can include individual support to a student or family interventions. FSSTT operates in 13 elementary and five high schools, but is available to all LBPSB schools upon request.

Yvan Cournoyer, Herbert Black, Mark Altman, and Guy Carbonneau at the Lori Black Memorial Golf Tournament. (Photo credit: Ryan Blau, PBL Photography)

Two hundred golfers participated in the 50th edition of the Lori Black Memorial Golf Tournament at Hillsdale Golf on July 14, 2014, raising $520,000 to benefit the Miriam Foundation. This event boasts the title of Canada's oldest charity golf tournament, and its continued success is attributed to the support of its Honorary Chair, Montreal businessman **Herbert Black**. Notables attending included **Yvan Cournoyer**, **Guy Carbonneau**, and CTV news anchor **Paul Karwatsky**.

Warren Greenstone, CEO of the Miriam Foundation, explains that the money raised will allow the Miriam Foundation to continue to support programs at the Gold Centre and the Miriam Centre that help people of all ages with ASDs and IDs. He extended thanks to all of the event sponsors, donors, volunteers, Chairman **Norm Bercovitch** and Honorary Chair Mr. Herbert Black.

Etoile de Pacho's Caroline Elias, Program Coordinator, Nathalie Richard, Founder and General Manager, and Etienne Fortin, Director of Strategic Development. (Photo credit, Sarah Latulippe)

L'Étoile de Pacho was created by **Nathalie Richard** and **Caroline Elias**, both parents of special needs children who have chosen to use their knowledge and experience to help other parents in similar situations. "After several years of living in this 'parallel world', we have come to believe that the best way to help parents like us is by sharing our journey, experience and resources," says Elias. "We get so much help and support at school, but parents, especially new parents, need help with the isolation. It is such a relief to know you're not alone and are understood, and can talk freely amongst parents that are going through the same experience."

Being well aware of the financial impact of having a child with special needs, all of L'Étoile de Pacho's services are free. These include: meeting with the families to go over all the subsidies to which they are entitled and all the available resources; a Caregiver Program that helps find reliable and competent caregivers; a Matching Parent Program that introduces parents in similar situations and locations to one another, and support groups that currently run twice a month. For information contact celias@etoiledepacho.ca or visit Facebook/etoiledepacho.

Jill Farber, Executive Director, Autism Speaks Canada accepts a cheque from Robert Goodwin, Director, Corporate Affairs and Executive Director, Mattel Children's Foundation with Bisma Ansari, vice president of marketing, MEGA Brands, Inc. (a member of the Mattel family of companies).

The Montreal Walk Now for Autism Speaks Canada counts Local Presenting Sponsor MEGA Brands as a corporate champion. During Autism Awareness Month in April, Mega Brands donated one dollar for every Mega Bloks toy sold by Toys "R" Us Canada, generating more than $20,000 in proceeds. Philanthropic donors contributed an additional $29,000. Mega employees raised $10,000 through bake sales and other creative weekly challenges. This amount was matched by parent company Mattel. As The Wall Street Journal reported, funds raised by MEGA Brands employees, partners and suppliers support autism treatment, education and advocacy.

"We at Mattel are excited to support this initiative led by the MEGA Brands employees," said **Robert Goodwin**, executive director, Mattel Children's Foundation. "MEGA Brands and Mattel are likeminded in our commitment to autism advocacy and research, and now that we are one company I know we can magnify our positive impact on the world."

During Autism Awareness Month last April, Mega Bloks invited children from local autism-related organizations to tour its Montreal headquarters - North America's largest toy factory – giving parents and kids the opportunity to see how the toys are made and learn more about the therapeutic benefits of Mega Bloks products (see our article on Page 18 of our Spring / Summer 2014 edition).

Dr. Patch Adams poses in his 'photo taking' stance with Zach Bouchard after a wheelchair hockey game at L'École Joseph Charbonneau (Photo credit, Wendy Singer)

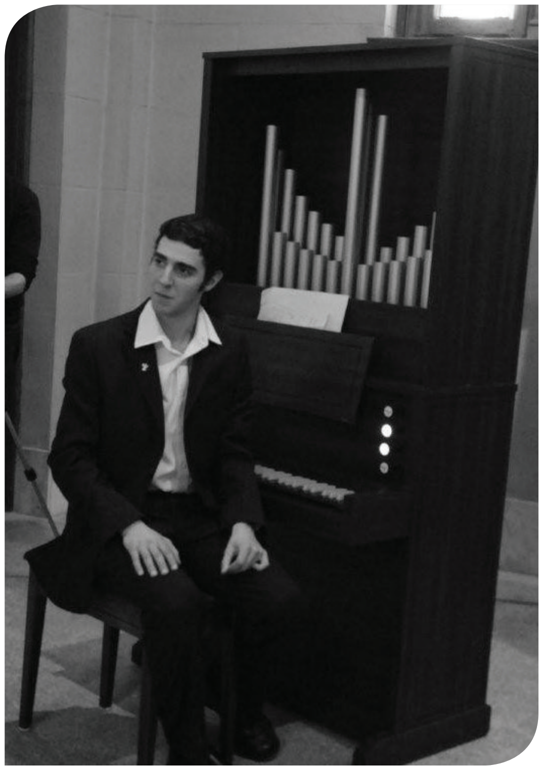
Montreal was treated to a whirlwind visit from **Dr. Patch Adams**, a world-renowned humanitarian clown and founder of the Gesundheit Institute. A highlight of his tour was a wheelchair hockey game with students at L'École Joseph Charbonneau, Commission Scolaire de Montréal. This school caters to students aged 12 to 21 years with motor difficulties. You might be wondering what happens when a team of local humanitarian clowns face off in wheelchairs with a talented and experienced school hockey team. The answer is quite simple and possibly obvious to you...there's a lot of clowning around, especially when the team captain is Patch himself! But somehow the students were able to roll with the antics and score enough goals to win 'La Coupe Symposium' (this title stems from the Université de Fou where Foulosophie is studied). Read about local humanitarian clown **Guy Giard**'s week with Patch Adams in Guatemala in this edition on page 33.

Nick Katalifos, Chairman, Giant Steps (GS) School and Resource Centre, and Pierre Simard, Chair of GS Foundation with two students from Selwyn House School.

The Annual Giant Steps Auction is the largest fundraising activity of the Giant Steps Foundation, bringing in $365,000 this year. **Nick Katalifos**, Chairman, Giant Steps School and Resource Centre, sent special thanks to the board members of the foundation for making this 24th edition a great event, including Chair of the GS Foundation **Pierre Simard**, event chair **Daniel Gauvin**, host and auctioneer **Charles Lafortune** and members of the organizing committee.

Katalifos was grateful for supporters who came out to the Windsor, including dedicated employees and volunteers, and a group of students from Selwyn House who contributed a donation of $5,000. Said Katalifos of the event: "The cause of autism moved a 'Giant Step' further tonight!"

GS has increased their number of students to 87, welcoming 18 new students, and opening two additional classes at the elementary level. The school is also collaborating with other schools and the community through its resource centre, increased collaboration with parents and new extracurricular activities for students. They also welcome children with an ASD who do not attend GS to attend their Camp Caravane. For information visit www.giantstepsmontreal.com.



Steven Atme

Steven Atme has been a friend to Inspirations for many years. We first met him when he was a student at Summit School's T.E.C.C. Copy & Print Centre (a non-profit initiative that creates a 'learn to work' environment for youth with special needs). He was amongst the first students to help us out with the distribution of our newspaper. And we have remained friends ever since.

In his fourth year of studies at the McGill Conservatory of Music, Steven is a pianist, composer, piano teacher, and public speaker. I was delighted, and moved, to hear his speech *Special People Have Dreams*, which recounts his life with autism, the challenges he faced as a non-verbal child, and how he has succeeded in embracing his talents and passions. This capable young man offers a unique perspective and understanding of autism. Look out for Steven in this year's I Can Dream Theatre Group production, *Hannibal The Musical* on November 14 and 15. Steven can be contacted for speaking engagements at eternal-life-1993@hotmail.com.

Maddie Pettigrosso, Founder of Montreal Special Needs Foundation, Margaux Watine, Corporate Partnership Advisor, Montreal Children's Hospital, and Melissa Nicole Legros, event planning student at Lasalle College at Project Runway fashion show.

The Montreal Special Needs Foundation (MSNF), founded by **Maddie Pettigrosso** in 2010, raises funds to ensure that children receive the therapeutic services necessary to improve their development, especially those that do not have the means to pay for private services. The foundation was inspired after Pettigrosso saw first hand how her daughter with special needs benefited from various therapies.

On September 25th, 2014, MSNF raised $4,000.00 at their annual Project Runway fashion show at Time Supper Club. Funds will benefit the Montreal Children's Hospital's Development Clinic, which offers a variety of health professionals, including doctors, psychologists, educators and social workers, to help children with developmental delays work on their language, motor and behavioural skills.

On hand to greet guests were **Melissa Nicole Legros**, event planning student extraordinaire at Lasalle College, and **Margaux Watine**, Corporate Partnership Advisor, Montreal Children's Hospital. The crowd enjoyed music by **DJ Evangelos** and singer **Kaila**. For information visit www.msnf.ca.

Program Contact: Enriching the lives of young adults

By Julie Lapostolle

Program Contact is a bilingual Social Integration program for adults who are 18 years of age and older. A part of the Centre D'Education Des Adultes De Lasalle, Commission Scolaire Marguerite Bourgeoys (CSMB), it is based in Lachine. The program is full or part-time and geared towards adults who have recently left the youth sector but are not quite ready for work or work programs.

The majority of our students that participate in Program Contact have a mild to moderate intellectual deficiency and perhaps a PDD (Pervasive Development Disorder). The program is unique in many ways. Firstly, we have our very own building. We don't have to share our space with any other programs or groups.

Classes are spacious and well equipped (Interactive White boards, computers, and tablets). There are English and French homeroom classes every Monday. The rest of the week is organized into workshops, which is the specialty of the program and where this team excels. Each teacher shares their particular skill or passion in these workshops. For example, I am passionate and share my knowledge about technology and art (a strange mixture!). The students experience a variety of workshops from Problem Resolution to cooking a simple lunch. Program Contact also has a dedicated kitchen program where a small group of students are being trained full-time in the kitchen.

This bilingual team of seven teachers and three educators bring their experience and skills for the purpose of enriching the lives of their students, and foster a sense of community and belonging.

I have been part of this team for eight years now, previously having taught in the youth sector (Elementary) both in Europe and Canada. A colleague of mine suggested I visit Program Contact to see if it interested me and I never left. I truly feel that we are able to provide an excellent environment for all of our students.

One of my favourite parts of the week is my art workshops. Over the years, students have produced some really beautiful items. I love enabling the students and giving them a sense of value, purpose and achievement and I think that, that is what Program Contact is all about.

Un programme d'insertion sociale qui développe l'autonomie

Par Jessie François

Le Centre d'éducation des adultes de Lasalle-Édifice Boileau au sein de la CSMB offre un programme d'insertion sociale répondant aux besoins d'élèves ayant des besoins particuliers (TED, déficience légère, troubles d'apprentissage et autres troubles associés). Communément appelé, Programme Contact, le centre accueille des jeunes et des moins jeunes désirant développer des habiletés de communication orale et écrite, des habiletés en mathématiques, des compétences en informatique et en cuisine. Les enseignants offrent aussi des ateliers d'habiletés sociales, des ateliers d'arts, des ateliers de bandes dessinées et de psychomotricité.

Lorsque les élèves ne sont pas en ateliers, ils participent à différents projets. Nous les encourageons à s'impliquer socialement en s'informant, en exprimant leurs opinions, en signant des pétitions et en organisant des levées de fonds pour des œuvres caritatives.

Le centre dispose de grands locaux équipés de tableaux numériques interactifs (TNI), d'un laboratoire informatique et de tablettes numériques. Chaque classe possède plusieurs ordinateurs ce qui favorise le travail individuel ou en petit groupe. L'utilisation de nouvelles technologies permet d'augmenter la motivation des élèves.

En plus d'offrir un environnement dynamique, au centre, les élèves bénéficient des services d'une psycho-éducatrice, d'une technicienne en travail social, et d'un éducateur spécialisé. Ils rencontrent régulièrement les élèves pour leur donner des stratégies pour gérer leurs émotions et leur offrir un support dans leur cheminement scolaire et personnel. Ils encadrent aussi les élèves à l'heure du dîner.

L'équipe travaille en étroite collaboration avec les parents et les intervenants sociaux pour développer l'autonomie de l'élève et lui offre tout l'encadrement nécessaire pour atteindre ses objectifs.

A la fin de son parcours scolaire au centre, l'élève aura de meilleures habiletés sociales. Il aura acquis de nouvelles connaissances qui lui permettront d'intégrer le marché du travail ou de vivre une belle vie active dans notre société.

Appelez-nous pour venir visiter le centre en téléphonant au 514-855-4197. Au plaisir de voir.

Julie Lapostolle et Jessie François sont Enseignantes CEAL Édifice Boileau-Programme Contact.


Program Contact class of 2014. (crédit photo : Jean-Samuel Gaultier Boudrias)

Mom-turned-inventor helps little bums sit with Senseez Pillows

When Stephanie Mitelman's son was a young child he had difficulty sitting long enough to finish a meal or read a book. While searching for a solution, an Occupational Therapist recommended she try a vibrating mat as kids respond to vibrations.

"I bought a big, heavy, electronic vibrating mat. My son loved it and was able to sit through a meal," shares Mitelman. "But it was heavy and weird looking. I searched for something smaller and more portable, but there was nothing available on the market."

This creative Montreal mom-turned-inventor took matters into her own hands. Opening up shop in her basement, she and her helpers began cutting out shapes and sewing pillows that would become the original line of Senseez vibrating pillows. Mitelman's first order of 600 battery operated pillows sold out within three months!

Senseez pillows are colourful, lightweight, fun-shaped (from hearts to turtles and dinos) vibrating cushions that offer a gentle sensation when squeezed or sat on. While enjoyed by all children, they have received a warm reception within the special needs community. Parents report improvements with sitting, falling asleep, concentration, tactile sensitivities, relaxation, and more.

While children aged four to 10 use these pillows for both therapeutic reasons and because they are cute and fun, they are also beneficial to older kids and adults who can squeeze them on their chest or put them behind their back. The vinyl 'Originals line' are easily cleaned and shareable amongst students in classrooms or therapy centres, while the plush 'Touchables line' are more appropriate for home use.

With the help of Operations Manager Todd Bercovitch, Senseez now has 63 vendors across North America and as far away as Australia. They recently won the Product of the Year Award by Creative Child, as well as the Editor's Choice Gold Award from the Family Review Center.

Mitelman and Bercovitch were thrilled to have pitched these pillows on the Dragon's Den television show last year. But the real thrill is in seeing other families benefit from the pillows. "This was something that was invented out of necessity. I figured that others might be able to benefit from the calming and soothing effects of vibrations as we did. I'm proud to be helping kids finish their homework or calm down. I'm proud of how many places are carrying our pillows. I'm proud to be helping people," says Mitelman.

Senseez is offering Inspirations readers 20% off of the purchase of Senseez pillows! Visit www.senseez.com and enter the code 'Inspirations' when you make your purchase. This offer is valid until December 15th, 2014.

The Miriam Foundation and government attack wait lists for diagnosis of autism and intellectual disabilities

By Wendy Singer

In the Spring / Summer 2014 edition of Inspirations, we featured an article about The Miriam Foundation's See Things My Way campaign, which aims to change the futures of people with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) and intellectual disabilities (IDs).

In this article, Warren Greenstone, Chief Executive Officer, Miriam Foundation, stated, "We're trying to raise funds to fill all the gaps. We're going to raise a lot of money but also we need to push the government in order to make some very positive change."

True to his word, at a press conference held on September 22, 2014, the Miriam Foundation announced a breakthrough partnership with the Ministry of Health and Social Services and the FQCRDITED (Fédération québécoise des centres de réadaptation en déficience intellectuelle et en troubles envahissants du développement) to improve the lives of children with ASDs and IDs and their families.

The Miriam Foundation will open a diagnostic centre early in 2015, where professionals will work together to eliminate the two-year wait list for some 800 children awaiting diagnosis. In order to do so, they will take over all wait lists from centres and clinics across the island of Montreal. See Things My Way will fund this diagnostic centre.

Warren Greenstone, Chief Executive Officer, Miriam Foundation, Claude Belley, President F.Q. CRD, Diane Proulx Guerrera, Chairperson of the Board, Miriam Foundation, Lucie Charlebois, Minister for Rehabilitation, Youth Protection and Public Health, Marie-Josée Coutu, President, Marcelle and Jean Coutu Foundation, and Charles Lafortune, TV and radio star, at a press conference announcing partnership with the government.
(Photo credit, Ryan Blau)

The Foundation will also support first line public programs to support and guide families following a diagnosis over the next four years, after which the public service network will assume complete responsibility for these services, offered at three different locations: CRDITED de Montréal, Centre de réadaptation de l'Ouest de Montréal (CROM) and CRDITED Miriam. The FQCRDITED will assist in the management of the required transformations. With the first line resources freed up thanks to the Miriam Foundation support, the Ministry has pledged to intensify specialized early intervention services for children with ASD and ID.

"The Miriam Foundation has always wanted to be a part of the solution," shared Greenstone. "The community and government must work together to transform and optimize services in our community."

Marie-Josée Coutu, President of the Marcelle and Jean Coutu Foundation, announced a five million dollar donation to the campaign. Jean Coutu, Co-chair of See Things My Way, shared his thoughts through a video message. "Through this donation, we believe that financial and human resources will be better allocated to support the growing needs of families touched by ASDs and other developmental problems. We must ensure that children and adults touched by these disorders can live full and productive lives. There is so much hope for them; our foundations want to give them every chance to succeed."

Also present were The Minister for Rehabilitation, Youth Protection and Public Health, Lucie Charlebois, and Diane Proulx Guerrera, Chairperson of the Board at the Miriam Foundation.

Look out for more exciting news from the See Things My Way campaign, and appearances from the newly appointed spokesperson, Charles Lafortune.

Stay connected with the Miriam Foundation on Facebook (FondationMiriamFoundation) and Twitter (@FondationMiriam).

Taking charge of your destiny

Dear world: I am here, I am awesome, and no I am not like everybody else.

By Jay Jones-Doyle

This can be a very hard thing for some people to internalize – this paradox of being both fantastic and different. Even harder to swallow is the reality that people who sit back and wait to be interacted with often find themselves left behind in the game of life. So how to deal with this conundrum and why is it so critical that you do (in my humble opinion, of course)?

Having a disability can mean being perceived as being less capable – depending on the disability. This isn't always the case, but is often not meant maliciously when it is done. For example, if I were to be walking down the street with my left foot turned in (as it does), and you were to see me, your first thought would probably not be “OH MY GOD I WANT HIM ON MY SOCCER TEAM!” This isn't malicious; it's just you assuming that I don't run that fast. But what if I am actually a fantastic goalie? Or what if I can actually run like the wind? Whose responsibility is it to show the world what I can do? It's mine.

Being in charge of your own destiny (as much as is possible) is a challenge that everyone faces, and few ever actually fully undertake. When you have a disability, it is even more critical that you open doors for yourself because if you don't others may not do it for you – or at least not usually in the way you want. This requires putting yourself out there and interacting with people, even if it's not something you're comfortable with. It doesn't mean that you need to talk to everyone, it just means that you seize moments and never say “I can't because I have a disability and they won't like that”. Assuming that others will react negatively towards you because of your disability is one of the most common and most limiting fears in modern times. It's also completely unfair and hypocritical to act on. Let's say that I choose not to interact with you because I am afraid of you judging me negatively – am I not judging you negatively? Am I not doing to you exactly what I fear you will do to me?? Knowing this, you can never again justify this type of behaviour and will forever hate me for it =).

I learned that lesson when I was 12, and it has haunted me ever since. It's forced me to talk to girls that I would have otherwise shied away from, to pursue personal and professional goals that otherwise I might not have, and to reach heights that I never would have. And you know what? It worked. I am successful, happy, and engaged, have a wonderful son and great friends, and don't regret very much. I give this to you, now, and sincerely hope that it changes your life as it has mine. Oh, and will you be afraid? Every step of the way - but feel the fear and do it anyway.

Jay Jones-Doyle is currently the Senior Financial Officer with the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, and was previously an intern with the UN's Business and Biodiversity programme. He was the 2010-2011 President of the John Molson Graduate Students' Association, and was named one of Quebec's top three graduate students of 2011 as well as Concordia's Outstanding Student of the Year. He sits on the Board of Directors of the Concordia University Alumni Association, and is the Marketing Coordinator for the Amal Foundation. Finally, he is an accomplished motivational speaker, a championship-winning junior hockey coach, is the proud father of a ten year-old boy, and has cerebral palsy.

John-F.-Kennedy School receives big boost

By Zachary Rath

The West Island of Montreal has a high number of families living with autism. That is a significant reason why the John-F.-Kennedy School (JFK) in Beaconsfield, Quebec, part of the Marguerite-Bourgeoys School Board (CSMB), has become such an integral part of that community.

Hosting 185 students aged four to 21 years with an autism spectrum disorder and/or intellectual disability, JFK is a specialized school that improves students' sensory processes and helps them to learn how to organize their behavior. The school puts their efforts into showing students how to become more autonomous while learning to play and socialize with other kids.

On Friday April 4th, 2014, Autism Speaks Canada along with Toys“R”Us/Babies “R”Us presented JFK School with a family services community grant of $25,000. The donation will better equip teachers to offer specialized sensory materials that will assist with the development of students. Sonia Gagne-Lalonde, Commissioner of the CSMB, knows the donation will go a long way. “There are huge needs to be covered at JFK. It truly does take a village to raise a child and the funds donated will be very well used.”

Teaching and learning on a daily basis take on a whole new meaning at this French-language school due to the hundreds of different programs that are tailored to each student. From pre-school to elementary to high school, there are part-time, full-time and individualized schedules created for students unable to remain in classrooms. About 110 staff members work on the grounds, which consists of three schoolyards and offers a learning environment unique to each student. Activities including music, art, dance and therapeutic baths are all part of a curriculum that creates proprioceptive and vestibular stimulation.

One essential goal that teachers focus on is the ability to create an atmosphere where the students gain a better understanding of the world around them. This can be difficult to accomplish at times, so staff members discover what type of schedule works for each student.

Toys“R”Us/Babies“R”Us is the national sponsor of Autism Speaks Canada whose mission is to change the future for all those who struggle with autism spectrum disorders. Autism Speaks Canada's signature fundraiser is the Walk Now for Autism Speaks event, and is held in nine cities. Montreal's fifth anniversary Walk Now event will be held on Sunday, May 24, 2015.

Krista Leitham, Regional Walk Manager for Autism Speaks Canada, Christine Harris, Store Manager, Decarie and Team Captain for the greater Montreal area Toys“R”Us/Babies“R”Us stores at the Montreal Walk Now For Autism Speaks Canada event, Peter DiMichele, District Manager, ToysRUs/BabiesRUs and students at JFK School. (Photo credit, Jean-Hugues Bonin)

Helping the child with special needs cope with parental break-up

By Lori Rubin

When a child finds out that his/her parents are going to be separating, it usually results in tremendous stress and anxiety. Questions arise about the reasons for the break-up, the stability and future of the child, ("Who will I live with?"), and depending on the child's age, financial concerns ("Will we have enough money?"). The period of time just prior to and immediately following one parent moving out of the family home is often filled with conflict, tension and worry. Ultimately, it is the adults themselves, who will determine if this life-altering transition will go smoothly with tempers remaining intact, or if family life will become a battleground that is fraught with unhappiness.

When there is a child in the family with special needs, the separation/divorce is even more detrimental. These children are often emotionally fragile, highly sensitive and unpredictable; can be quite temperamental, and usually have a different perception or interpretation of events from their more typical peers. It has been reported that up to 80 percent of marriages where there are children with special needs end in divorce due to the stress, fatigue, lack of support and financial concerns that often plague these vulnerable families. Children on the autism spectrum in particular have great difficulty when there is even a minor change in their daily routine. Therefore, the period of transition that occurs during separation can have a debilitating emotional/social/behavioural and even academic impact.

The level of language comprehension and cognitive functioning is a determining factor in how the child will fare. It is important for parents to try as much as possible to have the child understand what is going on, at their own level. This may involve the use of social stories, visual aids or pictos to explain the changes that are about to occur in their lives. Otherwise, there is a risk of explosive, non-compliant, even regressive behaviours once the child sees that there are no longer two parents living in the home.

A few additional things to remember when/should your family experience a parental break-up:

- Inform staff members at your child's school/daycare who are in direct contact with him/her, of what is going on. Make sure that regular home/school communication (phone calls, notes, logs) is in effect.
- Whenever possible, demonstrate respectful and open communication between you and your (ex)spouse/partner, especially when the child is within earshot.
- Seek help from your family social worker or mediator in making visitation/custody arrangements. Keep in mind that children with special needs often cannot cope with a "shared-custody" situation.
- Expect some immediate changes in your child's demeanour and habits (eating and sleeping patterns, mood, enhanced clinginess, etc.) following the announcement of the separation. Often, these behavioural changes are temporary.

Separation or divorce is never an easy thing for a family to go through, but the pain and sadness that is frequently associated with this event can be minimized when strategic planning and reasonable expectations are put in place for the child with special needs.

Lori Rubin is a Behaviour Management Specialist for the English Montreal School Board.

Erica Gambino conquers challenges with good humour, optimism and a smile

By Brittany Witt

Erica Gambino graduating from Lester B. Pearson High School

When Andy Gambino and Anna Tartaglia enrolled their daughter Erica at Lester B. Pearson High School (LBPHS) in Montreal North, with the help of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), all agreed it would be a positive move and give her an opportunity to shine.

Erica has special needs, and while some might view this as an obstacle, her parents knew otherwise: "As parents you know your child better than anybody," said Mr. Gambino. "We saw how capable she was and the growth in her ability to learn. We didn't want to deprive her of any opportunity."

The Gambinos were concerned about large class sizes and how their daughter would be accepted. Erica laughs and said the first year of LPBHS was a big adjustment; the workload and certain subjects challenged her. She also added that she didn't think she was any different; the first year of high school would be hard for any student.

The Gambinos' concerns were quickly put to rest. Erica's bubbly personality and warm heart, naturally endeared her to people. She became close to many teachers and students, and grew to be more self sufficient, independent, and comfortable with herself. Everyone was extremely kind and treated her with respect.

"When Erica sets her mind to something she can really focus," explained Mr. Gambino. "She overcomes challenges and really perseveres. When they learnt last April that Erica would graduate, they couldn't have been more proud.

"You should have seen the smile on her face," beamed Mr. Gambino. "When Erica walked onto the stage, all the teachers and students applauded. They recognized the effort and challenges that Erica faced over the past five years."

LBPHS Child Care Workers Terry Paci and Andrea DeVico agreed that Erica's success is thanks to her hard work and willpower. "Watching Erica receive her high school diploma was truly one of the highlights of our careers," they added.

Liliane Yiptong, Special Education Consultant at the EMSB shares: "Erica has blossomed into an assertive young lady who has taught us a lesson in perseverance and assiduity. She is a ray of sunshine that brings out the best in all who have the chance to be in her presence. Erica has also been blessed with supportive parents who have enabled her to believe in her potential."

PEERS® Social Skills Program

PEERS® (Program for the Education and Enrichment of Relational Skills) is a 14-week evidence-based social skills training developed at UCLA for motivated teens with ASD, ADHD, anxiety disorder and other social difficulties ages 11 to 18 to learn ways to help make and keep friends. During each 90-minute weekly session teens are taught important skills such as: how to use appropriate conversational skills, handle arguments and disagreements, enter and exit conversations, be a good sport, and more. Teens practice these skills in session during socialization activities. Parents attend separate sessions at the same time to learn how to assist their teens in making and keeping friends, expand their teen's social network and provide feedback through coaching during weekly socialization homework assignments.

Starts January 2015, WIAIH will house the debut of PEERS® in Montreal implemented by UCLA certified providers Loretta Labrecque, Natalie Miyake and Dr. Marie-Helene Prud'homme.Space is limited. For information: facebook.com/PEERSMONTREAL, Peersmontreal@gmail.com or 514-694-7090 x 214.

Disabled comic book characters inspire real-life role models

by Bram D. Eisenthal

Dave Michaels, paraplegic and Senior Editor at eXPress News & Reviews, at Montreal Comiccon 2013 with Tiffany Antrim, cosplayer for X-Men character Jean Grey. Michaels is doing his best Professor Xavier imitation and certainly appears to have Antrim fooled. (Photo courtesy of Dave Michaels)

Superheroes have a certain rep that runs rampant through the genre... that of invincibility. Perfection, too. Sure, Superman died in one of the most ballyhooed and outrageous incidents in the superhero universe (in the 1994 Death of Superman fiasco, where he perished at the hands of the nefarious Doomsday) and the mortally-human Batman often gets beaten to within an inch of his life. But they always survive, seemingly without much lasting hardship.

Still, in their quest to attract a larger range of readers in the gradually shrinking comic book industry (there were once more than 60 comic book shops in Montreal, but readers became so jaded by the money grab that occurred after the Death of Superman arc, when some stores were charging over $15 for a copy of Superman No. 75, they rebelled by stopping to buy comics. I was one of those people) comic book publishers and creators are getting "more real" with their stories and characters.

Previously taboo gay characters exist. One was introduced into the Archie universe, when Archie's new pal, politician Kevin Keller, became a series regular. Archie himself was shot to death recently while defending Keller's rights. And Archie Comics have introduced a physically challenged character, Harper, who is a "spunky fashionista" in a wheelchair.

Dave Michaels, 33, can appreciate physically-challenged characters more than the average person: He's been a paraplegic his entire life. Yet he learned quite young to adapt to the world around him, using some of his favourite similarly-challenged characters like Professor Xavier (of X-Men, confined to a wheelchair), Daredevil (blind) and Oracle, a onetime comic book character whose alter-ego was Barbara Gordon, paralyzed by The Joker in Batman's Gotham City.

Michaels, who was jazzed about attending the ninth version of the imminent, hugely popular Montreal Comiccon, certainly doesn't sit back and let any infirmities keep him from leading an active life. The Lasalle resident, who attended Riverside Park High, works as Senior Editor of the news page for Expert Comics, editing, scribing columns and working on related projects.

"Being paraplegic means that disabled characters certainly speak to me more," Michaels admitted. "But since I was a child, comics have taken on an important role for me.... their characters have instilled in me positive values and proven to be very inspirational."

Archie comic cover featuring new physically challenged character Harper. (Courtesy of Archie Comics)

I had to ask whether Michaels ever dreamt of flying like Superman as a kid and he said he did. Then again, I still have that aspiration.

(Continued from page 1)

Local 'Citizen Clown' visits Guatemala

By Guy Giard

Last year, after 20 years of teaching in museums, I decided to change my life! I quit my job, became a Laughter Yoga teacher and completed my first clown workshop. Last March, I joined Dr. Patch Adams on a Humanitarian Clown mission in Central America.

I didn't know what to expect but I trusted Dr. Adams. I knew about his work bringing joy and laughter into hospitals and orphanages from the biopic in which Robin Williams portrayed him.

Upon arriving in Guatemala, I met a handful of other clowns, who just like me, came from different parts of the world with a common desire to change the world and to make it a better place. I was part of a new community of love. Our mission: going to hospitals and orphanages to bring the gift of laughter. But joy wasn't the only present we were bringing. We were bringing hope, caring, tenderness, our ears to listen to their stories, and our hearts to give loving hugs.

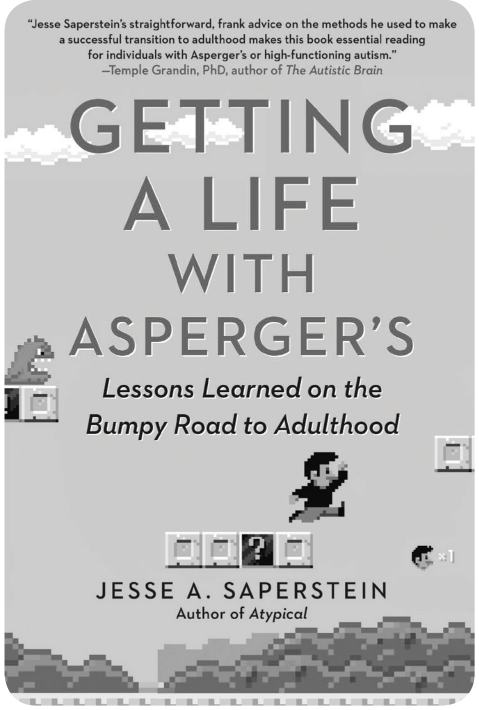
Humanitarian clowns are different from show clowns who present a well rehearsed spectacle. Our mission is to be available for the needs of the suffering. It can mean a one on one intervention, or spontaneously improvising with other clowns, family members or passersby. There are no scripts. By being present to their specific needs we empower our 'patients' by giving worth to their feelings. We acknowledge them, and make sure they know that they are special, never alone and that we care.

We visited orphanages for kids with HIV-AIDS, malnutrition centers, Down Syndrome and psychiatric clinics, heart care centres for the underprivileged, and seniors with disabilities. I had the opportunity to clown for orphan children and teenagers with Down Syndrome, who ran wildly towards us as we arrived, overjoyed with our visit. The staff and the director were just amazing. Many of the kids were fascinated with my harmonica and my green puppet Jackô. I spent a least half an hour just with one special buddy, walking and holding hands, playing football or just goofing around. I felt I was receiving as much as I was giving, and felt a twinge in my heart when I had to leave.

The more love I give, the more I am open to give. Now I know that I never need to ask for it myself because it is limitless; all you need is to start giving.

You can follow Guy Giard's amazing Humanitarian Clowning trips, including his upcoming trip to India with Patch, by subscribing to his blog and following him on Facebook. All the details can be found on his website at www.guygiard.com.

Michael McCreary performed his hilarious and insightful stand up comedy show "Does This Make My Asperger's Look Big" to great reviews at the Montreal stop of his cross Canada tour. McCreary aims to give people permission to laugh about something that is considered difficult to talk about. "You can't fix a problem if you're too afraid to address that it even exists," says McCreary. For information visit www.aspiecomic.com. In the photo: Andre Pereira, Mary Gouskos, Michael McCreary, and Nick Katalifos.



"Jesse Saperstein's straightforward, frank advice on the methods he used to make a successful transition to adulthood makes this book essential reading for individuals with Asperger's or high-functioning autism."
—Temple Grandin, PhD, author of *The Autistic Brain*

GETTING A LIFE WITH ASPERGER'S

Lessons Learned on the Bumpy Road to Adulthood

JESSE A. SAPERSTEIN

Author of *Atypical*

Inspirational Book Review

Getting A Life with Asperger's: Lessons Learned on the Bumpy Road to Adulthood

by Jesse A. Saperstein (Perigee Books, $17)

By Stuart Nulman

Before he carved out a niche as a well-known author, speaker and advocate for people with autism, Jesse A. Saperstein experienced quite a difficult path to adulthood from the time he was diagnosed with Asperger's at the age of 14.

Before his diagnosis, he was known as "Jessie the Troublemaker" and his misbehaviour was blamed on immaturity; when he was in college, his habit of sprinting across the campus for no apparent reason earned him the nickname "Running Jesse" which was followed by the much crueler "Sketchy and Scary Jesse"; his undeveloped work ethic and sometimes erratic social behaviour had him hold a series of jobs that he could not hold onto for a lengthy period of time, including custodian, a substitute teacher and a direct care professional, before he hit his stride as an assistant funeral home director; and there was a two-year period when he hit rock bottom (which he called "Loserville"), when between his 12-hour shifts at a computer manufacturing plant, he would do nothing but hang around in his messy room, play videogames and surf around Netflix, and subsist on deli food and Red Bull energy drinks.

But somehow, Saperstein managed to emerge from "Loserville", and learned that he can deal with his Asperger's and have a productive life and fulfilling career as an adult as well. And the many lessons he has learned on this long road into adulthood he shares in his book *Getting A Life with Asperger's*.

The lessons he imparts in this book are sometimes blunt and quite frank (and sometimes laced with sarcastic humour), but they are quite straightforward and practical for anyone who has Asperger's and wants to make that crucial transition from child to adult. Saperstein tackles such issues as bullying, managing your finances, being honest, dating, surviving college life, time management, beating addictions, and applying for -- and keeping -- a job. But perhaps the most thought-provoking chapter deals with what Saperstein refers to "The D-Word"; basically, he approaches the difficult aspect of how one with Asperger's should disclose their condition with their friends and colleagues as diplomatically and succinctly as possible without making anyone feel uncomfortable. His suggestions are quite good and reasonable; and his proposed Sesame Street-style scenario on how Asperger's should be disclosed for children is enough to almost move the reader to tears.

One thing the average reader (or as Saperstein refers to them as "neurotypical") must understand when reading this book is that although what the author presents may sound too typical for their comprehension, they must read it with the mindset of someone who has Asperger's in order to fully appreciate how this book can be such a valuable tool. Basically, they have to realize that what many of the issues and concerns that are addressed in the book many of us take for granted, has to be viewed as obstacles by someone with this condition ... obstacles that for most part are difficult, but not impossible, to overcome.

Getting A Life with Asperger's is a helpful, essential guide for anyone who has Asperger's to make that journey into adulthood a successful one. As Saperstein urges his readers that the road to such success is to embrace their Asperger's, so that "true progress will come from knowing when to be silly, perseverate, act weird, and educate others about our condition. As you make progress, you will see the transformation of these so-called weaknesses into strengths."

Ce que j'ai appris au Salon de l'autisme

Par Emmanuelle Assor

J'ai adoré le Salon de l'autisme qui a eu lieu début octobre à Laval. Pour la première fois depuis longtemps, j'ai eu l'impression d'être au bon endroit, au bon moment, dans ma nouvelle famille d'accueil.

J'ai fait pleins de belles rencontres, en passant des éducateurs inspirés aux parents motivés.

J'ai navigué entre tous les kiosques d'information, une centaine en tout, pour tous les goûts et tous les besoins. Rien n'avait été laissé pour compte car les organisatrices du Salon voulaient que tout soit pensé pour aider un parent d'enfant autiste.

Sur mon chemin, j'ai bavardé avec des spécialistes en nutrition, en sommeil, en orthophonie. J'ai fait la rencontre de musicothérapeutes, on m'a vanté les mérites de l'art thérapie, de la zoothérapie, j'ai côtoyé des superbes chiens de la Fondation Mira, et j'ai presque inscrit mon fils à des cours d'équitation, de karaté, de tennis, de yoga…. adaptés bien entendu! Plusieurs écoles spécialisées étaient présentes aussi pour présenter leurs services en passant de Giant Steps à Peter Hall sans oublier le Centre Gold. Tout ceci avait pour but de simplifier le cheminement du parent qui doit sans cesse chercher des ressources, je ne le dirai jamais assez…

Cela étant dit, le Salon de l'autisme, c'était aussi et surtout des conférences sur tous les sujets d'intérêt pour la communauté. Des conférences pratiques sur des sujets variés comme le stress parental, le sommeil, les crédits d'impôts pour personnes handicapées, l'autisme après l'école, le massage Qi Gong, et puis des témoignages d'Asperger comme celui de Marie Josée Cordeau, blogueuse et conférencière, si éclairant pour les «neurotypiques» comme moi.

Face cachée, face apparente de l'autisme

Pour clore mon tour de piste, je ne pourrai m'empêcher de parler de la captivante conférence de Brigitte Harrisson, autiste et travailleuse sociale (et oui, les deux sont compatibles!). Sommité dans le milieu, Mme Harrisson a parlé de la face cachée et de la face apparente de l'autisme, c'est à dire de ce que l'on voit et que l'on sait sur l'autisme (mot qui englobe tous les TSA) versus ce que les autistes ressentent, n'expriment pas et qui n'est pas documenté.

Après avoir redéfini la pyramide des besoins pour les personnes autistes, Mme Harrisson a surtout expliqué que pour elle qui est Asperger et adulte fonctionnelle, tout est différent. La perception de l'univers, la régulation des émotions et le traitement de l'information. Selon elle, «une personne autiste qui parle bien reste une personne autiste.» Son message est très clair, quand on est autiste, c'est pour la vie. Et quand on passe tout son temps à s'autoréguler pour s'adapter à son environnement, alors on n'a presque pas d'énergie pour socialiser et se faire des amis. Mme Harrisson, comme toutes les personnes que j'ai rencontrées lors du Salon, revendique le droit à la différence, à l'acceptation et au respect de l'identité autistique.

Au-delà de tout, ce que j'ai vu et ressenti au Salon de l'autisme, c'est ce même souci de se connecter à l'autre, pour mieux se comprendre et vivre ensemble. Mme Harrisson a conclu sa très brillante conférence avec une superbe citation : «Ce qu'il y a de pire que d'être autiste, c'est de ne pas avoir le droit de l'être». Je n'aurais pas pu dire mieux.

S.I.S. at Galileo Adult Education Centre present Grease

By Laura Hutchison

In September, 2013 several Social Integration Services Program (S.I.S.) for Adults with Special Needs classes had an ambitious idea to put on Galileo's very first musical production.

The musical chosen was *Grease*, roles were chosen, and rehearsals began! The students dedicated themselves to learning all of the speaking lines and musical lyrics. Dance routines were followed diligently and the creative set design process began.

Galileo's CRDIT-MTL joined the S.I.S. group, offering an inspirational and down right joyful performance of Pharell William's song *Happy.* They too began rehearsing their performance and creating beautiful art that would kick off the show in June.

The invites went out for family, friends, peers, administration, and anyone who wanted to come to the June 10, 2014 performance of Galileo's *Grease*. Students took great pride and pleasure in rehearsing in front of the Galileo Adult Literacy and Academic students. They were extremely proud to showcase their skills and talents in front of their peers in the audience. "It was nerve wracking and also exciting (to perform in front of the students)," says Caterina (S.I.S. student). "I felt really good afterwards."

The entire production became a real community event. On performance day, the S.I.S. students got into character with help from Laurier Macdonald Vocational Centre's Hairdressing and Aesthetics department, who volunteered their time and expertise to do the actors' hair and makeup. "I loved getting my makeup done by Laurier MacDonald. I never had my makeup done by a professional before," said S.I.S. student Ruby. Galileo's caretaker Wali volunteered his time and sound system equipment to create a professional musical setting, and A.J. photographed and videoed the production and open house that followed the show. Guests and students all felt they were part of a true musical in a Broadway show. "Having the microphones and speakers made us feel like stars and professionals," shared Tania.

The students were welcomed with grand support by Sylvia Lo Bianco (Vice- Chairman of the EMSB), Mario Argiropoulos (Assistant Director of AEVS Department, EMSB), students and teachers at Galileo Adult Centre and their families.

S.I.S. Students at Galileo Adult Centre performing in Grease. (Photo credit, A.J.)

Everyone took their places and watched with enthusiasm as the CRDIT-MTL group of students and teachers performed their phenomenal opening song and dance of *Happy*.

The performance went off without a hitch! The audience was brought to their feet for a standing ovation. The students beamed with pride and joy!

Thanks to all their hard work and dedication and to the constant support of their school, students, staff and Galileo Principal Martina Schiavone, and the support of Lino Buttino, Centre Principal at Laurie Macdonald Vocational Centre, the S.I.S. students successfully completed their first musical production performance. They are looking forward to a new musical journey next year of The Michael Jackson Musical!

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There are no limits to learning basic soccer skills, getting fit and having fun while discovering a healthy appetite for competition and strengthening a child's cognitive and gross motor skills.

Our ambitions are to fine tune and further develop each individual child's abilities so that they may discover their inner athlete and live life to the fullest.
For who: all children aged 4 - 17 years who are intellectually challenged, or who suffer from poor social skills or low self-esteem due to behavioral or learning difficulties.

When: Summer outdoor season - Saturday mornings from May through August.
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Cost: $50 per season.

Ratio of coaches to children varies between 1:2 and 1:4 – depending on the needs of the participants.

We also have a **Young Coach Mentoring Program**; for aspiring young coaches aged between 14 - 20 years.
Coaches and players alike learn valuable life skills that help overcome any challenges life throws at them.

Getting involved with **Super Sonics** is when the magic begins!

Kelly-Anne Soutter – Director General **www.lakeshoresoccer.ca or info@lakeshoresoccer.ca**

Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen

PARIS, FRANCE

Exactly 28 years after my last visit to Paris (http://en.parisinfo.com/discovering-paris and www.rendezvousenfrance.com), I recently soaked up the experience again of the French capital with all it has to offer. On the Paris Tourism website you will find tourist sites and facilities which provide access for individuals with special needs, taking into account four specific categories with accompanying logos: physically and intellectually handicapped and visual and hearing impairments.

WHERE TO STAY: Seven months before we even left for France, we began the challenging task of looking for a hotel. Upon recommendations from friends we targeted Les Jardins du Marais (www.lesjardinsdumarais.com). Located only blocks away from the famous Marais district, this beautiful hotel has 263 rooms and suites, an intimate restaurant and bar and excellent customer service. It is part of the Preferred Hotel Group (www.preferredhotelgroup.com). There are a number of handicapped accessible rooms. The main entrance and the walkway to the main courtyard is perfectly wheelchair accessible as well.

Our package included a beautiful and spacious deluxe suite. It had a king size bed with a solid sliding door leading to a living room and a most comfortable sofa bed. We had an extra sink, microwave oven, a dishwasher, a pantry cabinet, a stovetop burner, a working desk, a small table, a hairdryer and a very comfortable chair. There was also an outstanding buffet breakfast. Entry to that room is not wheelchair accessible, but the hotel will allow another family member to make up a breakfast tray and bring it back to the room or set up at one of the nice outdoor courtyard tables. The lobby of the hotel extends to reveal a dramatic 1,500 square metre backdrop of courtyards and gardens. You can only reach this exclusive and exotic locale after crossing the extremely secluded threshold of 74 Rue Amelot. The gardens are encircled by seven historic buildings with the 263 rooms. They include 86 Superior rooms and 120 Executive rooms that offer guests unparalleled tranquillity in the middle of Paris. Not all buildings are wheelchair accessible, so it is important to emphasize your needs upon booking.

The beautiful Eiffel Tower
(M. Chazeau photo)

The Saint Sébastien Froissart station on Line 8 of the metro is two minutes on foot from the hotel and it will lead you to any place you wish to go. There are roughly 50 Metro/RER stations within central Paris that have elevators and accessibility for wheelchairs. Although the stations themselves will be accessible, very few Metro / RER lines have roll-on accessibility for the train itself. Metro Line 14 and RER E have complete roll-on/roll-off access for wheelchairs right onto the trains and all station stops are accessible by elevator. The other Metro lines that have accessibility up until the train itself include Metro Lines 1, 2, and 13. The RER B train, popular for its Charles de Gaulle Airport to Paris route, has complete accessibility only at Gare du Nord.

BATEAUX MOUCHES: For our first night in Paris, we opted to experience the Bateaux-Mouches (http://www.bateaux-mouches.fr/en). Their fleet of nine boats are all enclosed in glass and bathed in light to cast off and accompany you on a journey through time. There are regular departures throughout the day and in the evening. You can choose the dinner or simple tour options. We chose the latter and did so on a gorgeous evening. The experience allowed us to discover all of the magic of the banks of the River Seine, which are enhanced, in no predictable order, by the most prestigious monuments which have marked history. Entry is wheelchair accessible, but the second level of the boat is not.

BIG BUS TOUR: In the first day or two of your trip be sure to proceed to get tickets for the famous hop-on, hop-off bus tours (http://eng.bigbustours.com/paris/home.html), operated by the Cars Rouges. This allows you to explore the city's top tourist attractions at your own pace. Throughout the ticket validity period, you can hop-on and off the buses at any of the Big Bus stops. A third of their fleet has wheelchair access on the lower deck, and they try to run these vehicles evenly throughout the service.

The Musee D'Orsay is wheelchair accessible.

NOTRE DAME: Notre-Dame de Paris (http://www.notredamedeparis.fr/-English), a masterpiece of faith, art and history, is the cathedral of the Catholic archdiocese of Paris. It is one of the best-known symbols of the French capital, and the most visited monument in France, ahead of the Eiffel Tower. Access to the cathedral is open and free of charge every day of the year, during the opening hours. The facility is wheelchair accessible.

THE LOUVRE: The Louvre Museum (www.louvre.fr/en) a former residence of the kings of France, has for two centuries been one of the biggest museums in the world. Its collections are spread over eight departments. The Louvre is open every day (except Tuesday) from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. on Wednesdays and Fridays you can go until 9:45 p.m.

There is free and priority access for disabled individuals and an accompanying person upon presentation of written proof. For the visually impaired, there are touch and descriptive tours, information in Braille and audio guides. For the hearing impaired, tours in French sign language, lip reading or cued speech are offered.

MUSEE D'ORSAY: Internationally renowned for its rich collection of impressionist art, the Musée d'Orsay (http://www.musee-orsay.fr) also displays all western artistic creations between 1848 and 1914. Its collections represent all expressive forms, from painting to architecture, not forgetting sculpting, decorative arts and photography. The museum is open every day but Monday. There is free entry for disabled people and an accompanying person on presentation of written proof. Adapted activities and workshops take place and wheelchairs can be loaned. There is priority access without queues at entrance C. The museum is entirely accessible and the auditorium designed to welcome up to three people in wheelchairs. For the visually impaired, guide and assistance dogs are allowed around the collections in the museum and exhibitions.

MOULIN ROUGE: The Moulin Rouge (www.moulinrouge.fr) is quite simply the most famous cabaret in the world! Located in the Monmarte District, the room is magnificently decorated in belle époque style and red velvet, with typical burlesque frescoes. This is a wonderful place to enjoy gourmet French food by the Maison Dalloyau, served with champagne - the official drink of the cabaret. But show only options are also available and that is what we opted for. We did get a fresh bottle of bubbly served to our table upon arrival. And what show! This is a "can't miss" stop for any Paris visitor. There are two shows per night. Contact their customer service officials in order for special accommodations. People in wheelchairs or walking with a cane or crutches will be given special attention.

DINING EXPERIENCES: I must have spent hours looking for just the right restaurant to "sandwich" in before the Moulin Rouge and the Koff Delicattessen (www.koff-paris.fr) at 15 Rue la Vieuville won out. It is a very short walk from the Abbesses métro station (line 12), which does have an elevator to street level. I would strongly recommend Koff. The husband and wife team of David and Jade designed this place like a New York deli. The menu features bagels, burgers, quesadillas, nachos, sandwiches, smoked salmon, Ashkenazi specialties, Russian dishes and a nice variety of salads. It is open for lunch and dinner. The Sunday brunch includes coffee or tea, orange juice, muffins, scrambled eggs, pancakes, sausage and smoked salmon. I must say that I very much enjoyed the pastrami club sandwich, accompanied by delicious hash browns.

Here is one more unique restaurant you will want to try. Breakfast in America (http://www.breakfast-in-america.com) has two locations: in the heart of the historic Latin Quarter, not far from the Sorbonne and Notre Dame and in the Marais district, near rue des Rosiers, the famous Jewish quarter. We experienced the Marais locale known as BIA2, which is completely wheelchair accessible from the street level. While we ordered breakfast for supper, this place is also known for being one of the best spots in Paris for burgers! What dishes are the most popular? At BIA, some favorites include: blueberry pancakes with real maple syrup, the Connecticut omelet, two by two, locally-baked bagels, their own "BIA Burger" and "Super BIA Burger," California chicken wrap, vegetarian wrap, home-made chili con carne, club sandwich, cheesecake, real milkshakes and much, much more! There are toasters at each booth.

Finally, here is a dreamlike dining experience atop the famous Eiffel Tower (www.tour-eiffel.fr) at Le Jules Verne Restaurant (http://www.lejulesverne-paris.com), located at the second level. Individuals in wheelchairs cannot go any higher than this. There are reduced rates for the disabled and I was told that by alerting staff individuals with special needs can move closer to the front of what are always endless lineups to purchase tickets. By booking lunch or dinner at Le Jules Verne you will be whisked to the second level in minutes and there is no wait to go back down when you are ready. Those in wheelchairs will enjoy the best view in Paris, without even having to step outside. We enjoyed the five-course tasting menu which included Bellevue Style blue lobster, with gold caviar; preserved duck foie gras; roasted marinated baby artichokes; seared sea bass or free range chicken fricassee; and some delicious desserts.

LIVE MUSICAL THEATRE: I strongly recommend an evening at the Mogador Theatre (http://www.stage-entertainment.fr/theatre-mogador). Founded in 1913, the Mogador is a performance venue of 1,600 seats located a few steps from Paris's department stores and Palais Garnier Opera House. Since 2005, the place has been run by the Stage Entertainment group and the eclectic program favours musicals. Five spaces are reserved for individuals with mobility issues, so please ask for this when reserving.

LONDON, ENGLAND

The history of London, England, stretches back over thousands of years. For my recent family trip to the British capital, this was an exercise in authentic learning at its best. Before you start planning, log on to www.visitbritain.org. Upon arrival in London, purchase an oyster card the first chance you get. These are plastic smartcards you can use instead of paper tickets. It is a pay as you go credit which you use when you travel and represents the cheapest way to pay for single journeys on the bus, tube, tram, DLR, London Overground and most National Rail services. Many of the tube stations are wheelchair accessible.

Most of the boats with London's City Cruises are wheelchair accessible.

WHERE TO STAY: We stayed at The Kensington Hotel (www.doylecollection.com) at the corner of Queen's Gate and the Old Brompton Road. This is part of the Doyle Collection, a privately owned group of eight luxury hotels located in the most fashionable neighbourhoods of five major cities around the world - three in London, one in Bristol, two in Dublin, one in Cork and one in Washington.

The Kensington only opened in 2009 and still looks spanking new. This was a fabulous place to stay in every which way. There is a full-time concierge desk and the folks there go above board to assist you. The front desk and upper management make it a point to get to know every guest on a first-name basis. We had a most unique suite: one main door opens leading to a small hallway, with two other doors at each side. They can be left open or closed. One has a king sized bed and a very large bathroom while the other has a queen. The units are very spacious and excellent for families to spread out and not be on top of each other.

Guests are invited to meet, dine and drink wherever they choose throughout the day, with The Kensington Afternoon Tea being an everyday highlight. As in any grand house, the 150 rooms at The Kensington vary in shape and in size, from the cosy to the opulently spacious. There is complimentary high speed Wi-Fi throughout the hotel, 24-hour room service, a spa and treatment room, luxurious, bespoke treatments and therapies which can be booked in room, laundry and dry cleaning services, a fitness suite, luxury car service and DVDs and game consoles.

We enjoyed a daily buffet breakfast in the main restaurant, called Aubrey, and returned there twice for absolutely fabulous dinners where we repeated the same orders: some amazing seared scallops, with heritage tomato dressing and basil; fish and chips with tartar sauce; and a whole sea bass with lemon and herbs. The other two London hotels from the Doyle Collection are the Bloomsbury in the Georgian district and the Marylebone, located near trendy Oxford and Bond Streets. For guests with special needs, the Kensington offers a lift for wheelchair users at the entrance to the hotel and there is a toilet for the disabled on the ground floor. Five accessible rooms are available for booking.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD: Our first activity was the Changing of the Guard, the process involving a new guard exchanging duty with the old one. While the ceremony begins at 11:30 each morning, at busy periods take my advice and get there at least an hour early - especially if there are members of your party who are wheelchair bound.

The Kensington Hotel is a fabulous place to stay.

BUCKINGHAM PALACE: Immediately following the Changing of the Guard we proceeded to Buckingham Palace and the Royal Day Out tour (http://tickets.royalcollection.org.uk/state-rooms-buckingham-palace/royal-day-out-2014/2014). This runs annually from late July until late September.

WESTMINISTER ABBEY: Kings, queens, statesmen and soldiers; poets, priests, heroes and villains - the Abbey is a must-see living pageant of British history. Every year Westminster Abbey (http://www.westminster-abbey.org) welcomes over one million visitors who want to explore this wonderful 700-year-old building.

THE ORIGINAL BUS TOUR: With over 80 stops, three main sightseeing routes and countless photo opportunities, The Original Tour (http://www.theoriginaltour.com) really is the finest way to see London and her landmarks. One fantastic value 24-hour ticket offers a truly comprehensive London sightseeing experience: on foot, by boat and on board a marvellous fleet of London's famous red buses. From historic sites and attractions, to some of the most famous views in this tour will take you where you want to go. This was probably one of the most relaxing experiences for me.

The majority of the buses are wheelchair accessible. One wheelchair (maximum dimensions 3'11" (L) X 2'4" (W) X 4'5"(H)) may be carried in the designated space, facing forwards, using the wheel clamps fitted. On other buses or if the space is unavoidably occupied the carriage of unfolded wheelchairs is not permitted. Folded wheelchairs may be carried, where space permits, in appropriate stowage areas. Although it is not necessary, they recommend that customers who require wheelchair access go to either Victoria (Grosvenor Gardens) or Picadilly Circus (Coventry Street) start points as a member of their on-street management team will be on hand to assist with information on the next available bus.

TOWER OF LONDON: The Tower of London (http://www.hrp.org.uk/TowerOfLondon)is a large open air site covering 18 acres (including the moat). As well as being a unique historical monument, it also houses part of the collection of the Royal Armouries. For those with mobility requirements and wheelchair users, there is a colour map detailing routes and other useful information. This historic building has places with difficult stairs and passageways and wheelchair access is limited. There are also a large number of steps throughout the Tower with cobbles laid in some of the roads. However, the Jewel House and the Crown Jewels are fully accessible to all visitors. A virtual tour of the Medieval Palace and south and east Wall Walks is available; it can be viewed in small chunks, a room at a time, or as a complete sequence. There is a new audio tour written especially for blind and partially sighted visitors. It guides you around the Tower, visiting some of the key areas including Traitors' Gate and the Bloody Tower. This gives you the chance to try on a helmet and handle chain mail as well as hear about the defence of the Tower. It also provides an opportunity to learn more about the prisoners who were held in this great fortress whilst exploring the graffiti they left in the Beauchamp Tower.

CITY CRUISES: City Cruises (www.citycruises.com) is not the leading operator of passenger services on the River Thames for nothing, carrying in excess of two million passengers annually on its extensive sightseeing, entertainment and charter services. We purchased hop-on hop-off Red River tickets, which enabled us to take in London's best sights with some of the best commentary the city has to offer - as well as the opportunity to hop on and off to experience them first hand. Most of the boats are wheelchair accessible. Individuals seeking such assistance are asked to contact the reservations team to discuss which boat is the best for you. There is a 50 percent discount on the normal fare for wheelchair users and 50 percent discount for one companion per wheelchair user. Blind passengers (with or without guide dog) travel free of charge.

LONDON EYE: Since its debut in 2000, the London Eye has become the symbol of modern London. This giant wheel does indeed give you the best view of London. .For this reason it has become as synonymous with the British capital as the Eiffel Tower in Paris. Over the years a 4D cinema

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experience has been introduced, capsules have been upgraded to improve air temperature control and reduce overall carbon emissions, as well as the introduction of interactive touch screen guides in several languages, giving guests more information on the breathtaking views.

All disabled guests can bring a caregiver free of charge on both the London Eye and the London Eye River Cruise. They are both fully accessible for disabled guests, with wheelchair access and special toilets. Reasonable documentation of disability is required in order to receive a free caregiver entry. Service dogs are welcome. There may be a small delay while practical arrangements are made. You can book your tickets for the London Eye and London Eye River Cruise via email or by calling our accessible booking line. Email accessible-booking@londoneye.com. Wheelchair access starts at the beginning of the boarding ramps.

Guests who are visually impaired may wish to purchase the London Eye Guided Tour. Guests who have a hearing impairment may wish to purchase their Mini Guide or Guidebook to enhance the experience. It is easy to get on and off the London Eye if you use a wheelchair or have walking difficulties. When you reach the embarkation point, the London Eye is slowed down or stopped to make boarding simple. Members of staff will always be on hand to assist guests, but they are unable to physically lift guests into and out of capsules. If you think you will need special assistance boarding your London Eye capsule, bring a caregiver to help. Their ticket is free.

DINING OUT: SOFITEL ST. JAMES: While in London we stopped by the Sofitel St. James, a luxury five-star hotel in London to dine at The Balcon (http://www.thebalconlondon.com).

The a la carte menu includes a selection of small plates such as “gin marinated organic salmon and vegetable à la Grecque” or a traditional Alsatian dish, the flammekueche tart, ideal if you fancy several starters or want to share with a friend. This restaurant is fully wheelchair accessible.

The spectacular Moulin Rouge.

Our server Sylvio started us off with a nice bottle of rose wine from Chile and a delicous selection of fresh baked breads. We ordered a nice salad to share and then moved to the main course. Two members of our party shared a delicious aged Scottish sirloin steak with Béarnaise sauce and some superb Rooster mashed potatoes. The steak cut like butter. I opted for the Wild sea trout fillet, with Jersey Royal potatoes, coriander and garlic sauce. At The Balcon, the house specialties are listed in brackets. Items such as grilled squid and Jersey Royal potato salad or Braised Angus beef short rib to start and the roasted Oxford lamb saddle or the Native lobster, with coquillettes pasta with clams and asparagus as main courses. I am glad we saved room for dessert: warm chocolate mug cake with milk ice cream and vanilla ice cream profiteroles with hot chocolate and praline sauce. If you are headed to London, this spot should be high on your list for an extraordinary dining experience.

TEA TIME: When in London, I was always told, one must experience afternoon tea. We chose to do so at the gorgeous Dorchester Hotel (www.dorchestercollection.com) in the stunning vista of The Promenade, which stretches the same length as the London landmark, Nelson’s Column. Refurbished in 2005 by Thierry Despont, The Promenade is a series of rich, warm, intimate spaces culminating in a stunning, oval leather bar at the end of the room. Very much the heart of the hotel, The Promenade is open all day for informal dining serving breakfast, morning coffee, lunch, afternoon tea and a supper menu. The Promenade features live entertainment on a daily basis. A pianist plays from 1:15 pm to 7 pm and live jazz music takes place from 7:30 pm each day.

The first thing to arrive at the table were some glasses of chilled Laurent-Perrier NV champagne. We were then given a menu containing six separate pages of tea choices. There was great detail under each one and after much thought the Paris and Dorchester blends won out. The former is a black tea flavored with currants, bergamot and caramel. As for the latter, a homemade speciality, is a truly elegant tea, perfect for anytime of day and includes a blend of Sri Lankan Ceylon and golden Assam teas and just a slight hint of caramel notes. Our server took the time to pour us cups throughout the evening. I normally have one cup per sitting. On this occasion I had four. It was that tasty and of course went perfectly with the rest of the servings.

Did we have room for a selection of French pastries? Well, we had to take our picks very carefully as we were feeling a bit full at this point. Nonetheless we were strategic and concluded this meal (and yes it was indeed a meal that lasted almost two hours) with a huge thumbs up. Our server was kind enough to send us back with our leftovers which we enjoyed back at the hotel the following day.

Afternoon tea is served five times daily. The Dorchester is situated in the heart of London’s Mayfair on Park Lane. The entrance and the Promenade are fully wheelchair accessible.

The Original Tour is the best way to see London by bus.

WARNER BROTHERS HARRY POTTER: While in London we could not resist the temptation of the Warner Brothers Studio Tour - the Harry Potter experience (http://www.wbstudiotour.co.uk). The Harry Potter film series made the town of Leavesden its home for more than 10 years. As the books were still being released while the films were being made, the production crew saved many of the iconic sets, props and costumes that were created especially for the movies - just in case they were ever needed later on in the series. Once filming wrapped on Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows - Part 2 in 2010, the production crew were left with a treasure trove of thousands of intricate and beautifully-made artefacts, The team behind Warner Brothers Studio Tour London - The Making of Harry Potter wanted to preserve and showcase these iconic props, costumes and sets so that Harry Potter fans could experience the magic of filmmaking first-hand. Many of the original cast and crew returned to reassemble the sets and record their memories from filming, and on March 31, 2012, the Studio Tour opened its doors. The Studio Tour offers visitors the unique opportunity to explore two soundstages and a back lot filled with original sets, animatronic creatures and breathtaking special effects. Digital guides are available in eight languages. The handheld digital guides contain facts about the sets, costumes and props showcased at the Studio Tour. Watch newly-produced interviews with filmmakers and exclusive behind-the-scenes footage. The English Digital Guide is narrated by Tom Felton, who played Draco Malfoy in the Harry Potter film series.

In the back lot, you’ll get the opportunity to purchase a cup of frothy Butterbeer, a non-alcoholic beverage reminiscent of shortbread and butterscotch. Children are invited to collect their own complimentary activity passport, which includes a fun Golden Snitch hunt to make their visit even more unforgettable.

All registered guide, hearing and medical alert dogs are allowed into the Studio Tour. While manual and electric wheelchairs are welcome, they do require advance notice due to seating restrictions within their cinema at the beginning of the visit. Due to the layout of the attraction, this also means that only a certain number of wheelchair users can enter the latter part of the tour at any given time. The Visitor Services Team will discuss this and other accessibility concerns with you prior to booking, so please do make them aware of your specific needs.

The majority of the tour is suitable for wheelchairs, but some areas can be difficult to navigate. This includes the Diagon Alley’s cobbled street and the Great Hall’s slate floor. The Knight Bus also has a short boarding platform which cannot be accessed by wheelchairs. The green screen area provides visitors with two fully accessible photo opportunities, including the chance to fly a broomstick as members of the cast would have done during filming. Visitors must be able to transfer themselves on to a broomstick and seatbelts can be provided if required.Tickets for Warner Bros. Studio Tour London – The Making of Harry Potter are available via www.wbstudiotour.co.uk and must be pre-booked in advance by selecting tour times throughout the day. The attraction is located just north of London and easily accessible by public transit.

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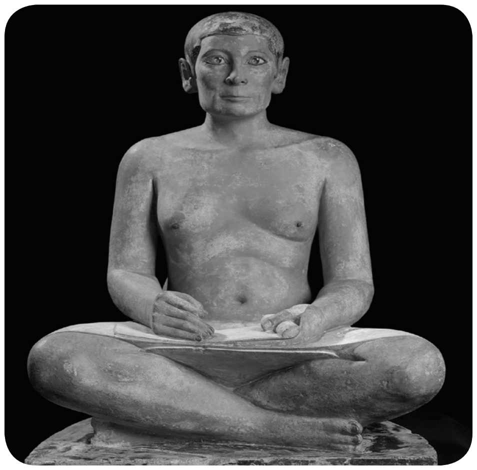

One of the exhibits at Le Louvre.


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