

INSPIRATIONS

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

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Spring / Summer 2013



Alexandre Bilodeau: The golden heart of an Olympian



Olympic gold medal winning freestyle skier Alexandre Bilodeau made an inspiring visit to the Mackay Centre School in N.D.G., which caters to students who are physically disabled and hearing impaired. Please read the full story and our exclusive interview on page 38.

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Supporting the Autism Community

The Giant Steps Resource Centre is dedicated to supporting the ASD community; people with Autism, parents and professionals. The Centre is open to all by appointment and offers a wide range of resources and support for a variety of autism related issues.



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Gold Centre and Lester B. Pearson School Board symposium May 17

Coping with Anxiety – Techniques to help students with Autism Spectrum Disorders

■ ■ ■ By Alycia Ambroziak ■ ■ ■



Jovette Francoeur knows first-hand about working with children with autism. As a special needs consultant at the Lester B. Pearson School Board, she works with schools to help map out strategies to support students with autism in the classroom.

That's one of the reasons she will be taking part in a workshop designed for parents as well as professionals such as teachers, integration aids and support staff called Coping with Anxiety – Techniques that help students with ASDs (Autism Spectrum Disorders).

"Although each individual is different, one of the common traits that we find in individuals with autism is anxiety," said Francoeur. "It may be due to communication challenges, social difficulties, sensory or other issues, but in any case, it's important to find the sources of the anxiety and find strategies to help support our students and teach them how to cope."

The symposium, hosted by the Lester B. Pearson School Board and the Gold Learning Centre, will take place on May 17, 2013 at Lakeside Academy in Lachine.

Adriana Karka of the Geneva Centre for Autism – an international leader in the development and delivery of clinical intervention services and training – will be the guest speaker at the day-long event.

"We're delighted to partner with the Geneva Centre for Autism as they are leaders in providing quality professional development in the field of autism," Francoeur said. "Although we already have many tools and resources at our schools, we are always looking for new ideas."

Karka has been with the Geneva Centre for Autism since 2007, first as an autism resource consultant and currently as a faculty member of the Training Institute.

An accomplished music therapist and behavior specialist for individuals with ASD and other intellectual and developmental disabilities for over 10 years, Karka previously worked for five years with the Autism Intervention Program at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario.

She also provided early intervention services and music therapy in both Chicago's Easter Seals Developmental Centre and the Montclair State University's Music Therapy clinic (called Music Aids Growth in Children (MAGIC)) in New Jersey.

Karka, who is fluent in English, French and Lithuanian, has also traveled to Eastern Europe as a lecturer on autism and special education.

The deadline to register for the workshop is

May 10, 2013. Refreshments and lunch will be provided and exhibitors will be on site during the lunch hour. Registration can be done online. For information visit: www.goldlearningcentre.com.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Thank you for presenting good resources with non-threatening inspiration. Parents are so fearful and I applaud you for your description of services which they must find so helpful. I enjoyed reading about the Miriam Foundation, which is very dear to my heart. Keep up your wonderful work.

Thanks,

Sharron Gersovitz

Montreal

Dear Editor:

I have a couple of friends who are studying to be Special Education Teacher Assistants and I love sharing Inspirations with them. Thank you to all the contributors and staff who put this publication together. Your work is appreciated.

Wow! I wish every teacher in Canada could read the article "The Soaring Fish" because the truth resonated with me.

I was "that kid" in the classroom, the one who liked to write comedic plays and puppet shows. My elementary school teachers were so kind, they would let my friends and I put on our "shows" for the classroom a couple of times a year. We were encouraged by our teachers, who must have been saints for their patience and understanding.

In my first year of high school, my English teacher gave a creative writing assignment: write an original Haiku. I was so excited that I snuck out that night to go hang out at the beach and write my Haiku in the moonlight.

I handed my assignment in at the beginning of class, so proud of what I had put together. At the end of class my teacher asked me to stay behind. She accused me of plagiarism and found it hard to believe that a grade 8 student could write like that.

I was crushed.

For seven years I had been encouraged to develop my writing skills, allowed to create puppet shows and plays complete with costumes and makeup. Then, in my very first high school English class, this happened.

At thirteen, unfortunately, my reaction was less than graceful. I informed my teacher (full of my teenage righteous indignation and vinegar) that I wrote the poem. She informed me that the only way I could prove to her that I did not plagiarize the piece was if I submitted it to the school newspaper. So I did.

I was so crushed, so hurt, my confidence slowly dissolved and my interest in school faded because I was accused of doing something wrong when I didn't; I was doing what I loved. I slowly withdrew and became that "ghost student", the one who rarely shows up for class and barely passes. I never creatively wrote again until I was in my forties, and funnily enough the very first piece I wrote ended up being published in an anthology.

If I could say one thing to teachers, it would be "please don't walk on flowers, they're fragile and take a long time to grow again."

Best regards,

Lisa Nolan

Montreal and White Rock, BC

The Lester B. Pearson School Board and the Gold Learning and Research Centre present

Coping with Anxiety - Techniques that Help Students with ASD

Guest speaker: **Adriana Karka**

Friday, May 17, 2013, 9:00 am - 4:00 pm

Lakeside Academy High School, 5050 Sherbrooke Street, Lachine, QC H8T 1H8

Parents/Students: \$40

Professionals: \$50

(refreshments and lunch included)

Register online before May 10th:

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Information: 514-345-8330 ext. 319





Employment Service for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing and visually impaired at the MAB-Mackay

By Cindy Davis

Martin Bergevin is not one to back down from a challenge. After graduating from university, Bergevin, who is deaf, moved to Arizona knowing little English to pursue a Masters degree in Archeology. Upon his return to Montreal, the highly ranked volleyball player who credits his life's successes to a supportive family that believed he could achieve anything despite his disability, decided to dedicate his career to spreading that message.

For the past six years, he has done just that through his work as an Employment Service Coordinator for the Deaf, hard-of-hearing and visually impaired clients at the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre.

"It was a slap in my face to see what can happen to people if they are not given the right opportunities," says Bergevin. "I

knew I could be a good example by saying to others 'Look, if I can do it, you can do it too.'"

MAB-Mackay offers employment services to help clients and employers through the job placement process and is the only organization in Quebec to offer integrated employment and rehabilitation services to the Deaf and hard-of-hearing and visually impaired.

From goal identification services, employment counseling and resumé building, to working with potential employers through sensitization workshops and incentive programs, Bergevin's goal is to ensure that every client finds his or her dream job. With an 80 percent job placement success rate, this service has made it possible for clients to fulfill their dreams of becoming pet groomers, hotel banquet managers, engineers and business

managers, to name a few.

MAB-Mackay also offers an intensive four-week Pre-Employment Program (PEP). PEP works with clients in understanding their needs, limitations and accepting their disabilities before providing them with job information and tools and eventually mimicking a work environment. "In our first workshop of eight clients with visual impairments last year, seven are now either working or are in school," says a proud Bergevin. This spring the PEP session will be geared specifically towards the culturally Deaf, and next fall, towards youth with a visual impairment.

This summer, MAB-Mackay will be teaming up with Canada World Youth, a non-profit organization, to send a group of hard-of-hearing youth to Kenya for six weeks to work on environmental issues and with local youth groups. MAB-Mackay Employment Service also works with mainstream high schools for the Deaf and hard-of-hearing and visually impaired, to help students learn appropriate social skills as well as acquire the necessary daily living skills, such as dressing appropriately for the workplace, preparing meals, and traveling independently, to name a few areas that would help prepare them for employment.

Whether working with young or elderly clients, students seeking their first job or those seeking new employment challenges, Bergevin emphasizes to all his clients that they can overcome their challenges with the right tools. "It's amazing to see the disabilities disappear when they realize, 'I can do it.'"

The MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre's Employment Service for the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing and Visually Impaired provide a wide variety of services, from professional career counseling, job search training, coordination and coaching for job interviews and more. For information visit www.mabmackay.ca.



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Mental Health Resource Centre

The Mental Health Resource Centre is a relatively new service offered by the Student Services Department of the EMSB. The mission of the MHRC is to promote mental health literacy via the dissemination of information regarding topics of interest and concern. We also offer support to schools on a needs basis via different modalities such as workshops (for staff or parents), program recommendations, school-based meetings, consultations, etc. For the 2012-2013 academic year the goal of the MHRC is to provide information and skill enhancement via professional development

sessions at the school for the following areas of concern:

- Building Resilience
- Bullying Information Session for Parents
- Anxiety and Stress

We have teams available to present at the schools or to conduct a needs assessment at your school and tailor the services offered to match the needs of the individual schools.



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For more information, please contact the coordinator of the MHRC:
Despina Vassiliou, Ph.D., Tel. 514-483-7200 ext. 7420,
email: dvassiliou@emsb.qc.ca or mhrc.@emsb.qc.ca



By Jason Goldsmith

Planet Sheldon



Planet Sheldon is inspired by Jason Goldsmith's autistic son Ellis. Please visit **The Big Blue Hug on Facebook** for more about Planet Sheldon and Ellis' unique art work!

Guest Editorial

By Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe, MP



In the last year, moving testimonies and tragic events have raised the issue of bullying of young people to the forefront of social awareness. There has been a mobilization around this issue: youth groups, school boards, and community organizations have stepped up their efforts to speak out against bullying and to establish an action plan to help combat it.

It is in this context that the MPs in the House of Commons were asked to debate and vote on bills with regards to bullying. The federal government can do its part, but how?

The introduction of Bill C-237, which proposed to criminalize cyber-bullying, could be one way to assist in the fight against bullying. However, many concerns have been raised by researchers and practitioners. This bill may have contributed to the number of young people in the criminal justice system while not necessarily discouraging them

“The federal government must do its part in the fight against bullying”

from cyber-bullying.

Another proposal was to develop a national strategy against bullying. This motion, introduced by my colleague Dany Morin, NDP MP in Chicoutimi-Le Fjord, encouraged the creation of a special committee to: 1) study the different forms of bullying, 2) develop a plan to identify and adopt best practices in anti-bullying, 3) support local organizations already working to prevent bullying and put the focus on prevention rather than crimi-

nalization.

Unfortunately, this motion was rejected last November with 149 votes against and 136 in favour. Until now, the MPs have been unable to agree on the appropriate response as well as the resources that should be invested to combat this problem. I find it regrettable that this initiative has been halted. I hope that these important discussions will continue and that parliamentarians will find a common ground, to finally provide adequate support in the fight against bullying. As a former teacher, I am proud to participate in these efforts. Meanwhile, I commend all those who work on preventing bullying and youth intervention.

We must remember that there are a variety of reasons why people are targeted by bullies, from personality characteristics to being in the wrong place at the wrong time. Unfortunately, research indicates that a child with a disability is more likely to be physically or verbally bullied than his peers. The effects of bullying are felt throughout childhood and can last long after the bullying has ended and into adulthood.

Bullying is, unfortunately, still a reality for too many children. It is therefore important to put aside politics and collaborate; we need to ask ourselves what more can be done to put an end to bullying?

Lysane Blanchette-Lamothe is the MP for Pierrefonds-Dollard.

Model for a day, model for forever

Formerly a model, the only difference between today and yesterday is my disability. For me, this disability is almost a blessing because it prevents me from falling into the superficial life.

I want inclusion and not integration. To integrate, one must disintegrate. The only difference between you and me is my wheelchair; I am first and foremost a human being!

Henry Desbiolles

INSPIRATIONS

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Wendy Singer



Inspirations Notebook



Rebbetzin Jungreis speaks at Yaldei's Celebration of Hope.

Yaldei's Celebration of Hope

Linda Mahler, Inspirations Coordinator of Educational Outreach, and I were two of some 300 guests that attended THE DONALD BERMAN YALDEI DEVELOPMENTAL CENTRE'S CELEBRATION OF HOPE. The evening began with a dessert and smoothie reception and silent auction before we turned our attention to host Tommy Schnurmacher from CJAD.

Mother Lisa Hamaoui shared the story of her family's search for treatment for their daughter who has Angelman syndrome. With the help of Yaldei, this family has celebrated more milestones than ever anticipated. Hamaoui told her story with such fervor that we could have left the event satisfied and inspired at that point.

But Yaldei had more in store! Seventy-six-year-old Rebbetzin Esther Jungreis is a best-selling author and world-class inspirational speaker. Small in stature, her words are grand and unforgettable. She relates her own personal stories, including surviving the Holocaust, to our daily struggles. Rebbetzin Jungreis' message was clear: "Follow the path that you are given, and never give up."



Flash Mob organized by la table de concertation en déficience intellectuelle (DI) et trouble envahissant du développement (TED) du Sud-Ouest de l'île de Montréal.

Flash Mob

A FLASH MOB was organized by the committee addressing intellectual and developmental deficiencies in the South West of the island of Montreal, more often referred to as LA TABLE DE CONCERTATION EN DÉFICIENCE INTELLECTUELLE (DI) et TROUBLE ENVAHISSANT DU DÉVELOPPEMENT (TED), in celebration of SEMAINE QUÉBÉCOISE DE LA DÉFICIENCE INTELLECTUELLE.

Participants from the various organizations that form this group, including at least 50 who have intellectual or developmental difficulties, surprised passersby with a seemingly impromptu dance in the busy lobby of Place des Arts.

"Le but de cette mobilisation est de démontrer au public à quel point il y a peu de différences entre nous et qu'une simple musique peut nous rassembler et nous permettre, ensemble, de faire un tout," says Caroline Langevin, President of the above-mentioned committee and Director General of Corporation L'Espoir.

The flash mob reminded us that 51,000 people with intellectual disabilities live on the island of Montreal, and through sensitization activities, we can attain inclusion and acceptance of one another.



Buddy pair Nathan Amar and Florian Zhou.

Next Chapter Book Club

NEXT CHAPTER BOOK CLUB (NCBC) is a community-based literacy and social program for adolescents and adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. NCBC was established in 2002 at The Ohio State University Nisonger Centre, and has been expanding across North America ever since.

Thanks to the funding and collaboration of the Azrieli and Miriam Foundations, the Gold Centre has started a chapter in Montreal. NCBC began in January, and meets weekly at Shaika – a lively local café.

The group chose "The Hunger Games" for their first book. They were midway through the large-print version when I attended one of their meetings. Animator Chesley Walsh encourages the enjoyment of reading, discussion and creative writing while nurturing socialization and the new friendships that are blossoming.

Book club member Ann shared her thoughts in writing: "I like the book club. It makes me so happy!" A new session of NCBC started in April 2013. For more info, visit www.goldlearningcentre.com under leisure programs.



Next Chapter Book Club meeting with animator Chesley Walsh and members.

BEST BUDDIES

BEST BUDDIES CANADA and CHAPTERS/INDIGO book stores held THE 5TH ANNUAL READ ALL ABOUT IT event on March 2nd. This celebration of friendship took place not only in Montreal, but in 17 other Chapters/Indigo bookstores across Canada. The event drew over 1,200 participants country-wide!

The Best Buddies program facilitates one-to-one friendships for people with intellectual disabilities and promotes inclusion within elementary schools, high schools, universities and colleges. The program helps all participants to gain valuable life experiences, leadership skills and above all, develop new friendships.

Buddy pairs from McGill University and the Miriam Home met at Indigo Bookstore in downtown Montreal. They were treated to an afternoon of fun that included ice-breaker games, special words about volunteerism from guest Jason Goldsmith of The Big Blue Hug, a bubbly and spirited performance by The Gold Centre Glee Club, and the purchase of a book of their choice with a Chapters/Indigo gift card supplied by Best Buddies Canada. For more information about Best Buddies contact 1-888-779-0061 or info@bestbuddies.ca.



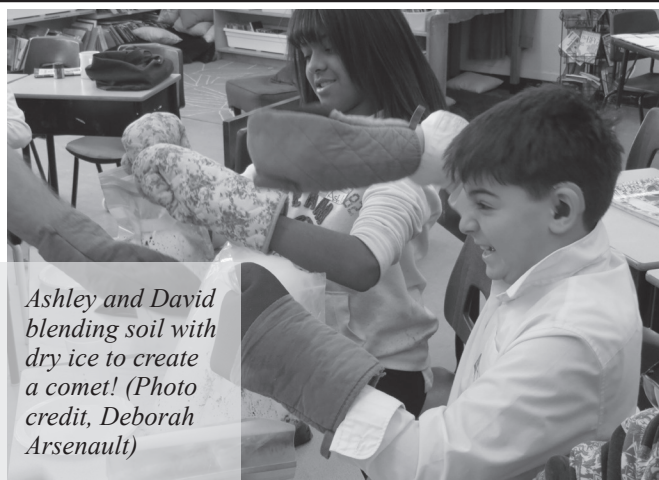
Gloria Cherney, Director of Summit School.

Summit School

SUMMIT SCHOOL CELEBRATES 50 YEARS! Summit School began as a summer camp in 1963 that morphed into a school attended by 39 students. Gloria Cherney, principal since 1970, has led the school to what it is today; a school that services over 500 students spread over three campuses.

In celebration of the school's 50th anniversary, Jesse Heffring and Jeremy Hechtman, in collaboration with over 50 of the school's students, have written an original play. *Rachel at Risk* aims to spread awareness about what it's like to have a developmental disability in today's society. The Summit School Players along with several staff members and parents can be seen on stage at the Mainline Theatre from May 29th - 31st. For information visit www.rachelatrisk.tumblr.com.

In conjunction with this special occasion, Cherney will also be retiring. We congratulate her for her vision and devotion, and wish her a gratifying retirement.



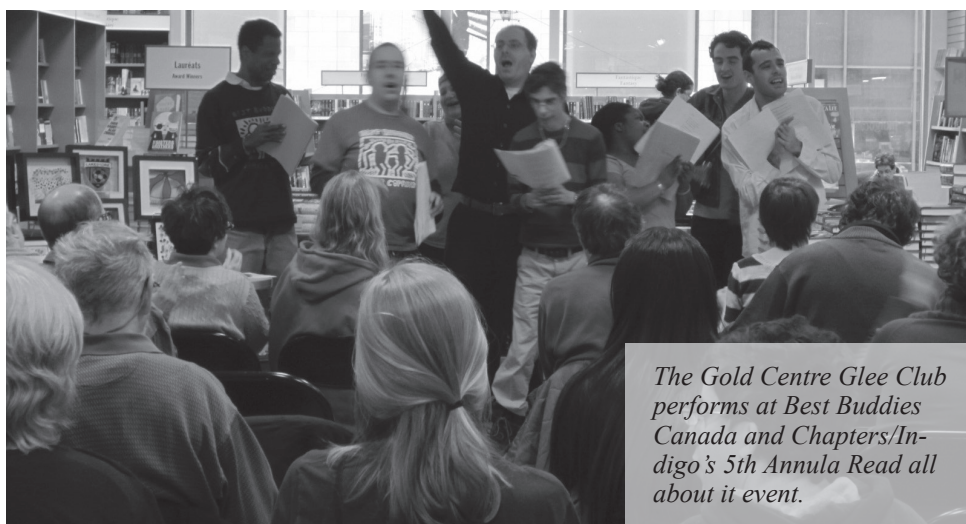
Ashley and David blending soil with dry ice to create a comet! (Photo credit, Deborah Arsenault)

MOSD

The MONTREAL ORAL SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF (MOSD) shares a wonderful collaboration with schools across Quebec, with about 80 percent of hearing-impaired students attending their local school while receiving once or twice weekly services from an MOSD integration teacher. Some children who are still developing skills to allow them to attend their neighbourhood schools attend one of the four MOSD classes located in Westmount Park School.

The MOSD class at Westmount Park recently joined the school's Grade 4 classes for a 'Space Science Day' put on by McGill University's Astrophysics and Cosmology Group's outreach program (<http://www.astro.physics.mcgill.ca/schools.php>). A team of eight adventurous McGill graduate students, led by Dr. Ryan Lynch, presented four fantastic hands-on sessions; Invisible Light with UV Beads, Pocket Solar System, Make your Own Comet, and Experiments with Craters.

The event went off without a hitch thanks to MOSD teacher and organizer Ms. Paul and all the enthusiastic volunteers from McGill. It was a fun experience shared by MOSD students and their peers at Westmount Park. Kaboom!



The Gold Centre Glee Club performs at Best Buddies Canada and Chapters/Indigo's 5th Annula Read all about it event.



(Left-Right): Kathy Vanbronswyk, Community Relations Advisor for Police Station 3; Carrie Goldberg, Executive Director of The Family Resource Center; Monique Verpoort, SNAP Project Leader; and Michael Wilson, Police Commander for Station 3 document the beginning of the SNAP Project in Montreal. Missing (Shirley Miller, Director of Project Communautaire de Pierrefonds).

EMSB Summer Language Camp

EMSB SUMMER LANGUAGE CAMP has been taking place during the first two weeks of August for the past 12 years. During recent years, it has been located at Honoré-Mercier Elementary School in Saint-Leonard.

The targeted population is EMSB students identified with speech-language and literacy (pre-reading skills) difficulties going into grade one or two. The camp is staffed by dedicated and experienced EMSB Speech-Language Pathologists.

The primary objective is to facilitate speech-language and literacy development by providing specialized interventions, including increased vocabulary, pre-literacy skills, sentence structure, social language use, etc. A secondary objective is to support transition into the following school year.

Daily schedules are built around themes, such as transportation and occupations, which are highlighted through fun activities including games and hands-on activities. A ratio of children to speech-language pathologist of 3:1 amounts to 50 hours of intensive speech and language over a ten-day period.

Campers experience both success and enjoyment, and parent feedback is positive. The clinicians are rewarded by witnessing language skills improve with intensive intervention during a short period. For information contact Kaori Ohashi at kohashi@emsb.qc.ca. Visit inspirationsnews.com/pages/Inspirations_Online_extra.html for the full story.

STOP NOW AND PLAN

STOP NOW AND PLAN (SNAP®) is an evidence-based program that uses cognitive behavioural therapy to reduce criminality in children ages six to 12. With the financial support of the Service de police de la Ville de Montréal's (SPVM) Community Relations Department and spearheaded by Commander Michel Wilson and Station Three's mental health team, The Family Resource Center (FRC) and Projet Communautaire Pierrefonds (PCP) have introduced SNAP® in the West Island.

The Snap Children's Project focuses on teaching self-control/self-regulation by giving high-risk children (possibly due to mental health or behavioural issues) the tools to cool down while making the proper decisions. The Family Training objective is to teach parents how to effectively regulate their own emotions in order to de-escalate problematic situations with their child and their families. Tools used include the Earl Assessment Tool and the Earl manual (a structured tool to evaluate children before and after completing the Children's Project); The SNAP Clinically Based Children's Program; and Family Support.

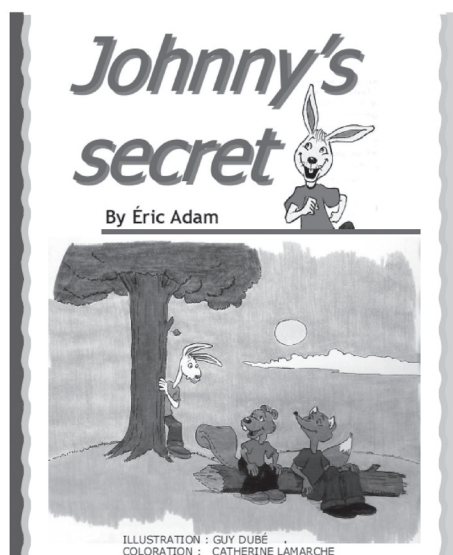
Inspirations is sponsoring the following not-to-be missed events taking place this spring. Please take a look through this edition to find out more about: The Learning Disabilities Association of Québec's Parent Conference: Toolbox for success on April 28th; Movement is the door to learning - a bilingual evening conference with Dr. Paul E. Dennison on April 30th organized by reKinexion; and Montreal's 3rd Annual Walk Now for Autism Speaks on May 26th.

If you have any tidbits to share, send them to info@inspirationsnews.com.



Supporting children with Dysphasia

By Robin Bernstein



Association Dysphasie + 's publication *Johnny's Secret / Le Secret de Jeannot*. (Photo courtesy of Dysphasie +)

Association Dysphasie + 's mission is very straightforward: to help individuals affected by dysphasia, also called Specific Language Impairment (SLI), specifically children, parents, teachers and support workers. Serving the communities of Laval and Montreal, Association Dysphasie + provides support services, programming and information sessions in both French and English.

Dysphasia, or SLI, affects a child's understanding and development of language and speech. It also prevents verbal communication and limits the child's ability to participate in age-appropriate activities. Even so, children with SLI are of normal intelligence, exhibit excellent observation skills and want to communicate with others. Association Dysphasie + works to help children, teens and young adults develop their skills for language and speech, as well as create social ties and independence.

Programs take place on Fridays and Saturdays in small groups that are divided by age. Starting at age three, children can take part in fun, cre-

ative and interactive groups that are aimed at enhancing language and fine motor skills, as well as building social confidence. For school-aged children, these skills continue to be enhanced as they prepare to put on a play for their families. Other skills, such as teamwork and conflict resolution are introduced. For teenagers and young adults, programs focus on developing a social network and creating independence.

Association Dysphasie + also disseminates information to children, parents, teachers and support workers about SLI through presentations, workshops and through the publication of a children's picture book called *Johnny's Secret* (or *Le Secret de Jeannot*). *Johnny's Secret*, written by Éric Adam and illustrated by Guy Dubé (both adults with SLI), discusses the difficulties of growing up with SLI through an easy to understand fairytale-like story. Strategy and support information is also available for loan and/or purchase.

To register for their brand new English group, purchase a copy of *Johnny's Secret*, or to obtain more information about the support services offered by Association Dysphasie +, please contact Marie-Andrée Tessier at 450-937-3670, info@dysphasieplus.com or www.dysphasieplus.com.

Robin Bernstein is a Learning Specialist and the founder of Brightside Learning.

A montage of the various activities of Association Dysphasie +. (Photo courtesy of Dysphasie +)



EMSB pilots welcoming classes for students with ASD

By Tania Piperni M.Ed



Teacher Cynthia Di Luigi, student Giuseppe Maiorano and the Welcoming Class at Pierre de Coubertin Elementary School.

For the 2012-2013 school year, the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) proudly piloted two Welcoming Classes designed to meet the very specific needs of students with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD). Elizabeth Ballantyne Elementary School in Montreal West and Pierre de Coubertin Elementary School in St. Leonard implemented this new program in August 2012.

The Welcoming Classes are for students with a diagnosis of ASD or who are awaiting an official psychiatric diagnosis. The setting includes a smaller class ratio (a maximum of eight students) with a classroom teacher and child care worker. It is for students at the kindergarten and/or grade one level. If entering the class at the kindergarten level, students can remain for two years as the program is geared towards facilitating the students' inclusion into grade two.

The goal is to apply a proactive approach that will prepare the students with the necessary adaptive and readiness skills that will maximize successful integration. In addition to this, the aim is to integrate the best possible physical setting, trained personnel, and best-practice models to facilitate the optimal development of these students' social, behavioural, communication, sensory-motor, and readiness skills. The school staff is supported by professionals from the Student Services Department at the EMSB, namely, a speech-language pathologist, occupational therapist, psychologist, ASD consultant,

and special education consultant.

During this pilot year, the students have each blossomed at their own pace. Language has emerged, positive behaviours have increased, friendships have been created, and academic skills have progressed. Students have been partially integrated into mainstream classes such as physical education, music, French and English Language Arts.

In order to be eligible for one of the Welcoming Classes, students must register at their community school within the EMSB territory. Then the School Board professionals will review the files of the students and make a decision as to who best meets the criteria for entry into a Welcoming Class. Parents will then be contacted and a case conference will be held to discuss these options. Ultimately, parents have the choice to either agree to have their child enter the Welcoming Class or they can choose to refuse this option.

The global objective of the Welcoming Class is to best prepare students with ASD with the necessary skills to succeed in the inclusive classroom. The global objective of the students? Have fun, learn new skills, and play with newfound friends.

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



The Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2013

Patricia Sansone: Including, Sensitizing, Caring

By Wendy Singer

Patricia Sansone worked as an inclusion coordinator at Giant Steps School for 11 years and is currently a special education consultant at the English Montreal School Board.

Her first experience with children with severe behavioural issues and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) was at age 17 when she worked as a camp counselor. "I was scared," says Sansone. "I didn't know what autism was. I figured out that I needed to connect on an emotional level, whether it was through play, a sense of humour, or just on a human level."

That summer experience marked the beginnings of Patricia's passion for the inclusion and success of students with autism and special needs.

Sansone worked in solidarity with Giant Steps; a school that encourages the academic and social inclusion of students with an ASD into mainstream schools, believing that fully participating in the school life helps the overall development of students with an ASD and enriches the experience of their neurotypical peers, preparing all students for adult life in an inclusive society.

Jocelyne Lecompte, M.D., Director General of Giant Steps School, worked with Sansone for nine years. Hard working, team player, creative, inspiring, enthusiastic, diplomatic and very knowledgeable are but a few words Lecompte uses to describe her. "Patty fights for what she thinks is right for the students,



Patricia Sansone and student Jonathan Bourassa. (Photo credit, Ross White)

and always places their well-being first. She believes in the potential of all children regardless of the severity of their difficulties," says Lecompte.

Sansone holds a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from McGill University and a Master of Education from Concordia University. She implemented a life skills therapy program for all age groups at Giant Steps and worked as an educator, including one child into her neighbourhood school, before becoming the Inclusion Coordinator for Giant

Step's French side, where she included students into ten different school boards.

Giant Step's inclusion process begins with the sensitization of all staff and students in the hosting schools. "I learnt that you cannot force the inclusion process on anyone. If you do you will get integration, not inclusion. The child will be in the back of the class with the educator using the space but not fully participating in all of the activities," shares Sansone.

In order to combat resistance, fear and uncertainty, Sansone created a 'Sensitization Awareness Project' for students of all ages, teachers and administrators. This program embraces differences and teaches strategies on how to address the diverse learner. Patricia was known for her pink suitcase full of tools that help peers walk in an autistic person's shoes, including an MP3 player loaded with amplified sounds.

"Patty made sure that staff understood autism, and that educators understood the child inside and out. She didn't just say it, she demonstrated it," says Lecompte.

Our Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2013 is proud that, with persistence, she included students in school programs that were not mandated to service ASD students, and the experience proved so positive that these schools later welcomed others with an ASD.

Patricia has learnt many lessons from the students that she adores and the team at Giant Steps: "I've learnt from occupational therapists, speech therapists, colleagues and teachers. It was a give and take. However, the kids stand out the most because we're all learning from them. They're amazing teachers!"

Now looking forward to new challenges and opportunities to learn in her new role at the EMSB, Sansone encourages anyone working with children to be open-minded and think outside the box: "Be flexible so you can meet the needs of the gifted and those with learning differences. Connect with your student as a person first."

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 Teacher of Inspiration to nominate, email mcohen@inspirationsnews.com.

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"Patricia deserves to be commended for her work. She truly believes in the children, never underestimates them, and challenges them according to their needs and levels. She made sure the kids and educators were well included and respected within the classrooms. She is a great role model for anyone that needs advice or guidance or is starting in the field."

- Natasha Fontes, Operational Planning Coordinator of Giant Steps School.

"When one considers the issue of autism and special needs in general, Patty is a leading figure in Montreal and beyond. Her career serves as an example to everyone in education and her commitment to her students speaks for itself. At a time when more and more students with special needs are entering the school system, the EMSB is fortunate to welcome someone who is as passionate and knowledgeable about inclusion as Patty. I know I speak on behalf of the entire Giant Steps community in wishing her the very best in her new post."

- Nick Katalifos, Chairman of Giant Steps School.

"Patricia has been a great addition to the Student Services Department of the EMSB! Her invaluable experience at Giant Steps will undoubtedly contribute significantly to increasing our collective expertise in addressing the needs of students with autism, who currently comprise approximately 40 percent of our student population with handicaps."

Patricia is a very dynamic, personable, passionate, caring, respected and knowledgeable professional who has proven herself to be a solid team player. She is seen as being very supportive of in-school personnel with regard to meeting the needs of students with particular challenges.

Patricia has demonstrated a strong commitment to improving the well-being as well as nurturing the academic, personal, and social development of our student population.

Thank you, Patricia, for joining our Board!"

- Lew Lewis, Director of Student Services, EMSB

- Julie René de Cotret, Assistant Director of Student Services, EMSB



McGill Transition Support Program for young adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders

By Keeley White, Tra Flanagan and Aparna Nadig

The difficulties characterizing Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are often associated with childhood. However, ASD is a lifespan diagnosis impacting adulthood opportunities in the community. Despite the need of continued services throughout the lifespan, there has been a specific focus on early intervention. This childhood approach to research and intervention leaves many young adults without proper support in crucial areas such as independence.

Given the increased prevalence over the past 10 to 15 years, we are facing a significant population of individuals with ASD

entering adulthood. The alarming gap in knowledge and transition support services has grave consequences for the individuals and their families and for society given the financial burden of long-term adult care.

For these reasons, we have embarked on a joint venture between McGill's School of Communication Sciences and Disorders and the Department of Educational and Counseling Psychology. Funded by the Max Bell Foundation, we aim to provide a transition service for young adults with ASD who often have limited access to the support they need after leaving the school system; to raise awareness of this need with policy

"Our ad in the Spring 2012 edition of Inspirations really kicked off recruitment for the Transition Support Program – we had been trying for months before that to little avail. Inspirations really helped us get in touch with the right people and now we have a long waiting list of folks who will be participating over the coming sessions."

– Aparna Nadig, PhD



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Permettez-moi de profiter de cette occasion pour saluer le travail, l'engagement et la générosité exceptionnels de toutes les personnes associées à la publication d'une des revues les plus inspirantes, le *Journal Inspirations*. Je vous souhaite une bonne continuation!

Permit me to take this opportunity to salute the exceptional work, the commitment and the generosity of the many individuals associated with the publication of one of the most inspiring journals, Inspirations Newspaper. I wish you all much success!

Jacques Chagnon



McGill Transition Support Program co-directors Aparna Nadig, PhD and Tara Flanagan, PhD.

makers; and bring together stakeholders who are committed to this cause.

We have developed a 10-week Transition Support Program adapted to individuals self-expressed needs in the areas of communication, self-determination (the freedom to live or act as one chooses without consulting with others and to maintain or improve one's quality of life), and social skills. The overall goal of the program is to increase participants' quality of life and provide them with basic tools to identify and pursue their interests and objectives. The program is aimed at 18-to 30-year-olds with an ASD who do not have intellectual disability (as there are very few services available to this population), and who can communicate in English (for the time being, we would like to expand the program to have French groups as well). The program follows a small-group format with four to six participants and two facilitators. A unique feature of the program is that we begin by asking participants what their needs are and adapt the curriculum according to the group's needs. We are evaluating our program's effectiveness through a research study, to see if it should serve as a model for other programs in Canada.

In the summer of 2012, we conducted a pilot session of our program. The six participants mostly reported mid-range skills and needs in the areas of communication, self-determi-

nation, and working with others. However, self-determination skills were mentioned as a high need by half of the participants. Participants reported lower skills before the program across the three target areas, followed by medium to higher skills one month post-program. Overall, participants found the program to be informative and a positive experience.

In addition, we organized a community stakeholder conference in November 2012 to engage community members and policy makers in spreading awareness about the need for services for young adults with an ASD. The conference enabled us to share results from the pilot session of our program and obtain feedback about the service we are providing.

We are currently enrolling participants for groups running in Summer and Fall 2013 and 2014. Please contact us if you would like more information or would like to be put on the waiting list for future groups! For more information about our Transition Support Program, please email transition.program.asd@gmail.com or visit <http://poplab.mcgill.ca/transition-program.html>.

Aparna Nadig, PhD and Tara Flanagan, PhD are co-directors of the McGill Transition Support Program for Young Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders.



Commission scolaire **Riverside**
Riverside School Board

Inspirations from Riverside!

By Martine Tremblay

First Annual Track & Field Event at REACH

REACH School hosted its first Track and Field Event at Seaway Park on October 5th, 2012.

The athletes had to compete in as many as seven disciplines from long jumps, stick handling, team relay, shot put, precision marathon, 60 meter sprint and 60 meter hurdles. With opening and closing ceremonies, the day could not have been more authentic!

Although the weather did not cooperate, parents, teachers and volunteers worked hard to make REACH's first annual track and field event a great success. Congratulations to REACH teachers June Bastos and Donna Howe for initiating this event.

The school is hoping to expand the track and field event over the next few years by inviting other schools to participate and have it become a Special Olympics competition.

The Wave against bullying

The Third Annual Wave against Bullying took place in Saint-Lambert on October 24th, 2012.

Saint-Lambert Elementary School headed up this initiative, and was joined by other Riverside schools in Saint-Lambert including REACH, Chambly Academy, Champlain College Saint-Lambert and two classes from Saints-Ange School.

"Collectively, our schools are making a statement that bullying will not be tolerated in our schools," says Deborah Angelus, Principal of Saint-Lambert Elementary, and the main organizer of the event.

Students, staff, parents and residents were lined up along Green Street to take a stand against bullying of all kinds. Saint-Lambert police were on-site to ensure the safety of the more than 1,000 people that participated.

This awareness campaign, conducted by the teachers with the students, includes talking

about bullying and its harmful effects and what can be done to stop it.

Riverside students conveyed a strong message to the community and beyond, and their beliefs and action made the event a great success!

Art exhibition

The students of the Step-up Program at ACCESS took part in the Real/Surreal Art Exhibition on November 27th, 2012.

There were figurative, surreal and abstract works by art class students, as well as an open submission display of work submitted by participants from the entire ACCESS community. Our talented students from the Step-Up program were also exhibiting recent artwork, as well as original illustrated children's stories that they showed to visitors on their iPad. The event was a great opportunity to see inspiring works of art!

On November 18th, 2012, REACH technician Mahmoud Boumati ran the Philadelphia Marathon to raise money for the students and activities at REACH. He ran the marathon in three hours and 15 minutes and raised over \$1,500!! Congratulations, Mahmoud!

Défi sportif Altergo

For the very first time, special needs students from Centennial Regional High School had the opportunity to participate in the Défi Sportif Altergo program. Volleyball, hockey, track and field and rhythmic gymnastics were on the menu for the selected athletes who joined the team. This program gave students the opportunity to compete with athletes at a simi-

lar level and to forge new friendships. The competition took place from April 22nd to April 26th, 2013.

S.T.R.I.V.E. Kentokukan karate

Centennial Regional High School's Kentokukan karate team is STRIVING! The S.T.R.I.V.E. program aims to teach students core values such as respect, perseverance, hard work, well being and leadership. It is geared towards students in a school setting who normally wouldn't be able to participate in sports such as those with physical limitations and learning difficulties. Students work on their basic karate skills every class. They learn self-defence techniques, the

importance of good nutrition, and above all tolerance, good will and respect towards one another. The team is fortunate to study with Lise Lavoie, a passionate first dan black belt in Kyokushin karate and a S.T.R.I.V.E. instructor who's been practicing martial arts for the last 10 years. She is so proud of her stars! On February 25th, the students were evaluated for their next belt; their hard work has paid off, their progress is astonishing!



The Centennial Kentokukan karate team.



Students from Riverside take a stand against bullying.

Shawna, a REACH student, at the opening ceremony of the track & field event.



Lucie Roy, Director of ACCESS; Sylvain Racette, Director General of Riverside School Board; Yunus Ozer, student; Eugene Abrams, Art Instructor; Jeremy Fitzgerald, student.



La cyberintimidation, c'est l'affaire de tous

Par Catherine Korah

L'intimidation, dont les jeunes pouvaient autrefois être victimes principalement à l'école ou au terrain de jeux, s'est maintenant infiltrée dans nos foyers par le biais d'Internet et d'appareils électroniques. Aujourd'hui, outre la violence sociale, verbale et physique que de nombreux élèves sont déjà forcés d'endurer, la cyberintimidation s'ajoute aux autres formes d'abus qui affecte d'avantage nos jeunes.

La cyberintimidation consiste à utiliser des appareils électroniques comme un ordinateur ou un téléphone cellulaire pour intimider, embarrasser, menacer ou harceler une ou plusieurs personnes. Des commentaires inappropriés ou blessants sont parfois affichés dans des sites Web, des photos ou des vidéos embarrassantes sont envoyées par courriel ou des textes de harcèlement sont envoyés par cellulaire.

Une enquête de Jeunesse, J'écoute (2007) révèle que 35 % des élèves canadiens ont été victimes d'intimidation, dont 27% sur Internet. Ce même sondage révèle que 44% des jeunes interrogés disent avoir intimidé quelqu'un en ligne au moins une fois. Selon l'enquête de Jeunesse, J'écoute, les jeunes qui ont fait de la cyberintimidation évoquent les raisons suivantes pour expliquer leurs actes:

- parce qu'il n'y a pas de supervision;
- parce que c'est anonyme;
- parce que c'est un moyen facile de se venger;
- pour augmenter ou maintenir leur popularité.

Étant devant un écran, l'intimidateur a encore moins de retenue dans ses propos que s'il était face à sa victime. L'intimidation peut se produire n'importe où et n'importe quand. L'intimidation peut prendre plusieurs formes à l'intérieur du cyberspace. La capacité de propagation des mots et des images est instantanée et illimitée. Le nombre de témoins est difficilement mesurable. Le tort fait à la victime est en continu puisqu'il demeure sur le Web.

Pour prévenir et traiter la violence, il n'existe pas de solution facile, unique, immédiate qui puisse à la fois être efficace et perdurer. Dans le cas de la violence dans l'espace vir-

tuel, comme c'est le cas pour l'intimidation, puisque la « loi du silence » est souvent de mise, l'intervention n'est pas l'affaire de quelques individus, mais celle de tous.

Les parents

- Encadrer et structurer les jeunes dans leur utilisation d'Internet (ex. établir des règles claires avec l'enfant);
- Observer les comportements de leur jeune dans Internet (ex. les sites fréquentés);
- Amener à reconnaître les signes lorsque votre enfant se fait intimider;
- Encourager les enfants à venir se confier si quelqu'un dit ou fait quelque chose en ligne qui les effraie;
- Alerter la police si l'intimidation comporte des menaces physiques.

Les jeunes

- Apprendre que l'utilisation de l'univers virtuel se fait selon un code d'éthique;
- Éviter de donner des renseignements personnels (ex. adresse courriel) à des gens que l'on ne connaît pas. De même, éviter de révéler ses mots de passe à ses amis;
- ne pas répondre à un message provoquant ou insultant;
- Quitter l'environnement où a lieu l'intimidation et prévenir un adulte de confiance de la situation vécue;
- Bloquer les messages de la personne qui harcèle et ne jamais y répondre;
- Enregistrer les messages de harcèlement et les fournir aux fournisseurs de service Internet ou de téléphonie cellulaire.

L'école

- Intégrer des activités de sensibilisation pour contrer la cyberintimidation et expliquer la gravité du harcèlement aux enseignants, aux élèves ainsi qu'aux parents;
- Interdire le harcèlement par Internet dans une politique globale contre l'intimidation;
- Alerter la police si l'intimidation comporte des menaces physiques.

Catherine Korah, M.Ed., c.o. est une spécialiste en gestion du comportement au-Commission Scolaire English-Montréal.

La vignette d'accompagnement touristique et de loisir (VATL) : Pour profiter pleinement de vos moments de loisir

Par Carole Marcil

Encore trop peu connue, la vignette d'accompagnement touristique et de loisir (VATL) accorde la gratuité d'entrée à l'accompagnateur d'une personne âgée de 12 ans et plus ayant une limitation fonctionnelle qui a besoin d'une aide lors de visite dans les lieux touristiques et de loisir. De plus en plus de sites touristiques et de loisir acceptent la VATL, permettant ainsi aux personnes handicapées de profiter pleinement de leurs installations.

C'est l'organisme AlterGo, dont la mission est de favoriser l'inclusion sociale des personnes handicapées par l'abolition des obstacles au loisir, qui gère le programme de la VATL sur l'Île de Montréal.

Pour obtenir la VATL qui est offerte gratuitement, il suffit d'en faire la demande en allant sur le site www.vatl.org. Vous devez remplir le formulaire et le transmettre électroniquement. Si vous préférez obtenir une version papier du formulaire, communiquez avec Dany Verner par courriel à dany@altergo.net ou par téléphone au 514-933-2739, poste 243. Lorsque la personne est accréditée, ce qui prend environ deux semaines, la vignette est acheminée par

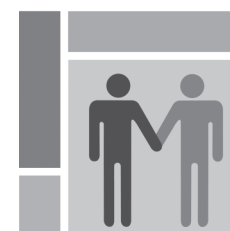
la poste. Aucun renouvellement ne sera nécessaire.

Où la VATL est-elle acceptée à Montréal?

Plus d'une cinquantaine de musées, festivals, théâtres, lieux d'activités sportives et de plein air, cinémas et autres acceptent déjà la VATL sur l'Île de Montréal. Et le nombre d'organisations participantes est en croissance.

Pour bénéficier des avantages de la VATL, la personne handicapée doit la présenter aux guichets de l'un des nombreux lieux touristiques ou de loisir participants pour que la gratuité soit accordée à son accompagnateur. Le détenteur de la vignette d'accompagnement doit, quant à lui, payer le prix de son entrée.

La liste complète des organismes acceptant la VATL sur l'Île de Montréal est disponible sur le site d'AlterGo à l'adresse http://altergo.net/programmes/docs/Bottin_VATL_Montreal.pdf.



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Julie René de Cotret

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La transition école - vie active, une étape importante dans la vie d'un jeune ayant des besoins particuliers

Lorsque nous sommes parents d'un enfant ayant des besoins particuliers, chaque transition demande une plus grande planification. Le plan d'intervention devient alors un outil important qui aidera ces transitions par la mise en place de stratégies, qui faciliteront le cheminement scolaire de l'enfant. En tant que parent, le passage vers une nouvelle étape de la vie peut devenir source de stress, si cette transition n'est pas planifiée adéquatement. Lors du passage vers le monde adulte, comment s'assurer que notre jeune ne se retrouvera pas en bris de services au moment où il quittera le secteur scolaire? Qui aidera notre enfant à poursuivre son cheminement en tant qu'adulte et comment se garantir qu'il recevra les services auxquels il aura droit?

Outre le plan d'intervention, il existe également un autre plan, tout aussi important, qui vise à faciliter la transition entre l'école et la vie active. Le plan TÉVA, Transition École Vie Active. Le plan TEVA vise à réunir les différents partenaires du secteur de l'éducation, de la santé, de l'emploi ainsi que des organismes communautaires et associatifs dans le but d'élaborer un projet de vie, qui conviendra aux besoins du jeune et de sa famille. Le plan TÉVA se définit comme un ensemble coordonné et planifié d'activités axées sur l'accompagnement de l'élève et sa famille dans l'élaboration et la réalisation de son projet de vie¹. Le but de cette démarche est d'aider le jeune à relever les défis qui lui permettront de s'assurer un passage harmonieux vers le monde adulte.

¹ Roxane Bernard, Engagement jeunesse Montréal et Elizabeth Cordeau, Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, 12 février 2013

La démarche TÉVA est une approche multisectorielle qui vise les différents aspects de l'insertion sociale du jeune.

C'est pourquoi il est important comme parent de s'assurer que notre jeune soit connu des services sociaux afin que ces derniers puissent prendre le relais lorsqu'il quittera le monde scolaire. Si tel n'est pas le cas, il est toujours possible de contacter votre Centre de santé et de services sociaux (CSSS) afin de faire une demande de services. Ces partenaires vous seront utiles afin de maintenir un continuum de services pour votre enfant dans sa transition vers le monde adulte.

Une démarche TÉVA est amorcée par l'école, elle s'adresse aux jeunes de 15 ans et plus, ayant des besoins particuliers, qui fréquentent une école secondaire. Bien que la majorité de ces jeunes ait l'opportunité de rester à l'école jusqu'à l'âge de 21 ans, il est important d'amorcer la démarche de TEVA quelques années avant qu'ils n'atteignent les 21 ans. Une démarche bien planifiée permettra au jeune de réaliser un projet de vie qui saura répondre à ses besoins.

Si votre jeune a plus de 15 ans et que vous croyez qu'il serait un candidat potentiel pour une démarche TÉVA, n'hésitez pas à contacter la direction de l'école qu'il fréquente afin que vous puissiez travailler en collaboration avec celle-ci.

Julie René de Cotret est la directrice-adjointe Services aux élèves, à la Commission scolaire English-Montréal.

Des succès en emploi pour les personnes ayant un trouble envahissant du développement

Par Martin Prévost

Au cours des trois dernières années, ce sont plus de 150 intégrations en emploi de personnes ayant un trouble envahissant du développement (TED) sans déficience intellectuelle, qui ont eu lieu avec le soutien du service À l'emploi!, offert par l'organisme Action main-d'œuvre inc. La scolarité, l'expérience et les intérêts des candidates et candidats étant extrêmement variés, les emplois obtenus le sont tout autant.

Il n'y a pas d'exigence de scolarité pour s'inscrire au service. Aussi, y retrouve-t-on aussi bien des personnes qui n'ont pas complété les études secondaires, que des gens de métier, des techniciens et des professionnels. Parmi les emplois occupés par les participantes et participants d'À l'emploi!, notons ceux-ci : préparateur de commandes, aide-fleuriste, testeur de jeux vidéo, commis de bibliothèque, enseignant au collégial, préposé au service à la clientèle dans un club vidéo, nutritionniste, ouvrier horticole, éducatrice spécialisée auprès des enfants autistes, pharmacienne, réceptionniste, technicien en documentation, ingénieur, aide-général en cuisine, commis à la saisie de données, archiviste, programmeur informatique, commis d'entrepôt, comptable et bien d'autres.

Pour souligner les efforts des personnes ayant un TED qui s'intègrent en emploi et de leur employeur, différentes récompenses sont régulièrement attribuées. Notons le Prix Peter Zwack, remis annuellement par la Fédération québécoise de l'Autisme, qui a été attribué à deux participants d'À l'emploi!, messieurs Nicholas Hébert et Louis Thérien, respectivement à l'emploi d'une grande chaîne de magasins d'électronique et d'une société d'État.

Soulignons aussi les certificats de reconnaissance remis deux fois l'an par Action main-d'œuvre inc. à des employeurs méritants. Les trois premiers récipiendaires de ces certificats sont le restaurant-traiteur Tomato basilic, le Laboratoire de sciences judiciaires et de médecine légale (notre photo) et Multi Restauration Service.

Pour être admissible au service À l'emploi!, il faut être âgé d'au moins 16 ans, avoir en main un rapport diagnostic ou un rapport d'évaluation faisant état d'un TED, pouvoir se déplacer pour aller travailler et parler le français ou l'anglais. On peut faire une demande de service en composant le 514-721-4941, poste 113.



Au premier plan, de gauche à droite, Élisabeth Lebel, technicienne de laboratoire et Diane Séguin. En arrière-plan, l'équipe de travail.



Do you or your child have a disability?

Do you or your child have a disability? You may be eligible to receive a disability tax credit from the Federal Government! Visit <http://www.specialneedsplanning.ca/tax.html> for information. Additionally, you may also be eligible for a registered disability savings plan to have over your lifetime. For information about the plan and eligibility visit <http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/goc/rdsp.shtml>.



Playing on purpose, in the classroom and beyond

■ ■ ■ By Ilana Ben-Ari and Gonzalo Riva ■ ■ ■



'What I said wasn't what I meant', with Christopher Tiller and Laurent Quétel. (Photo credit, Bobbie Variantzas)

We usually grin happily when we say we run a toy company. But don't let that fool you. We think toys can do serious things. You'd be surprised by the zigzags that stem from that belief.

Our first toy, Connexions, a 3-d abstract puzzle for two players or more, began as an industrial design project developed with the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB). The goal was bold but clear: to create a toy and game that visually impaired students could play with their sighted classmates. The idea was for the play to be just plain fun, but also to foster understanding intuitively – so that it wouldn't feel like typical formal learning.

By starting from the principles of Orientation and Mobility ("Where am I? Where am I going? How do I get there?"), the hope was to make one player put themselves in the other's shoes. From the moment the toy's original player (Emily, a 4th-grade student with visual impairment) referred to an abstract cog-shaped piece as a "flower" – and her play partner cautiously agreed to use the creative term – we knew that play could nurture the building of common languages and help negotiate across wide communication gaps.

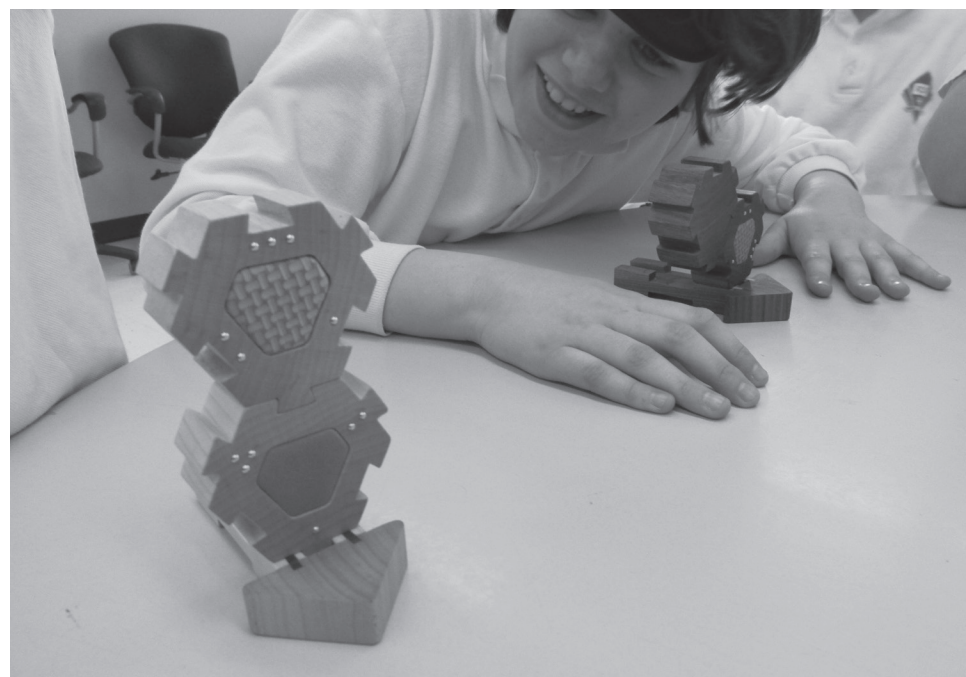
Connexions was soon nicknamed "the empathy toy," and so began our adventure with the Connexions Toy for Empathy & Creative Dialogue. We've since begun designing a whole new category of toys to teach

those abstract, complex, composite skills that will make or break the 21st century: empathy, failure, innovation, improv, conflict resolution, collaborative learning, and more. How can toys possibly spur the rise of these abilities? It's a question we explore daily.

Our toys have found their way into a variety of school settings. Notably, the Dufferin-Peel Catholic District School Board is using the toys as universal tools – sometimes in special needs settings and sometimes to discuss ability, access, or diversity in mainstream classrooms. New applications keep emerging in different schools: the toys are used in guidance activities; with youth-at-risk senior students; and from Winnipeg to the Northwest Territories to some current placements in Montreal for a wide array of language, curriculum, and social-emotional learning possibilities. (We even have a few corporate clients who are savvy enough to know that playing on purpose is good business!).

The most interesting zigzags always happen when players react to the game experience like a mirror for their challenges and ideas, developing new ways to play and themes to discuss. It's incredible seeing such versatility in players' thinking – witnessing toys and play unlock a dormant talent, perspective, or difficult conversation. It helps make us unwavering in our conviction that everybody is a genius; everybody can find a place where they fit.

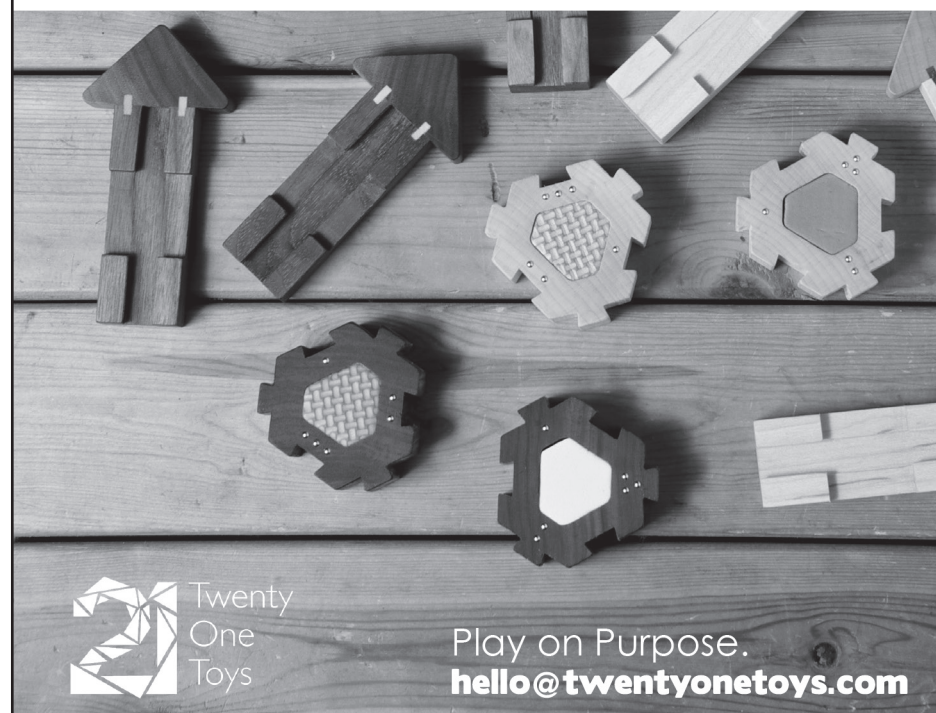
Continued on page 23



Laurent discovers the end results are 'Not quite the same!' (Photo credit, Bobbie Variantzas)

How do you teach empathy and abstract thinking with toys?

Originally designed with the CNIB, these toys are now teaching 21st-century skills in schools across Québec, Ontario, and beyond. Join us at the edge of education: www.twentyonetoys.ca



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The sky's the limit for Asperger children

By David Schipper



Photo: Beachers smile

The ultimate goal is for your Asperger child to continue to grow both academically and socially. In order to accomplish this, you will need an appropriate plan that does not focus on one aspect

to the detriment of another. As a result, your child will have unlimited opportunities both socially and professionally.

When I first meet parents of a young person with Asperger syndrome, I always conclude the meeting with this advice: the people that help your child on a daily basis cannot read your mind.

If you think that teachers, therapists, and others will proceed with the strategies that you envision without your continual feedback, you are mistaken. It is critical that you maintain constant contact with the appropriate individuals in order to ensure optimal

success for your child both academically and socially.

As a parent of an Asperger child, you continue to learn about your child's needs, and

you must similarly help others do so as well. For example, it is possible that some of your child's teachers do not possess a similar approach in working with students with special needs. Help them! You know that your child has difficulty with eye contact, but the teacher may have a different interpretation of the behaviour. Also, do not assume that each teacher has read your child's evaluation report and its recommendations. Teachers will appreciate the feedback and guidance you provide, especially if it is offered in a friendly manner.

If the Asperger student in your household suffers from anxiety related to tests, they will benefit from cognitive behavioural therapy, medication, or a combination of both. As well, if your child is entitled to a reader in addition to extra time during tests, you could suggest to the school that the reader be the same person as often as possible.

My favourite approach in helping an Asperger student academically is something I call relentless kindness. If the child knows that the learning environment is safe and nurturing and that they are considered different and not disabled, they will trust your long-term approach. Above all, encourage

academic excellence by cheering success while minimizing the effect of occasional setbacks. I always tell students that they cannot change the past but can only focus on the future.

Speaking of the future, doing well in school is only half of the battle. One of the most difficult challenges that a parent of an Asperger child faces is socialization both in and out of school. I believe that this is as important as academics, and must be treated as such.

This is why I recommend a combination of any of the following: social skills training, social communication therapy, and occupational therapy. Behavioural therapy can feature a mix of formal and informal settings. An example of the latter is having your child join a Scouts group.

Finally, talk to your child. Your child's feedback is the most valuable of all. Sometimes what they say may surprise you and might even provide valuable insight.

David Schipper, B.A., B.Ed., is the director of 2Torial Educational Centre.

EMSB staff and students play, and learn!

By Wendy Singer

Gerald McShane Elementary School, Westmount High School, and Philip E. Layton School for the Blind have been playing with the Connexions Toy for Empathy & Creative Dialogue (see page 14), marking its first use in Quebec schools.

Were EMSB staff and students up for the challenge? You bet they were!

Ilana Ben-Ari, Gonzalo Riva and I met with Bobbie Variantzas, Community Learning Centre Coordinator, Nancy Richer, Principal and Carine Chenet, Special Education Technician at Gerald McShane Elementary School.

Both blindfolded, Variantzas led Chenet in constructing a three-piece variation of the puzzle. I was impressed with Variantzas' ability to direct Chenet with clear and accurate instructions. But her descriptions were not always interpreted as anticipated. It left

Chenet frustrated, exclaiming: "It is hard to be blind!"

As an observing 'third player', I quickly realized how putting yourself in someone else's shoes, with compassion and empathy, is the key to better communication.

Gerald McShane students found their play quite productive. "They understood that what they said and what the other student did were often not what they intended," explains Variantzas. "They quickly recognized that their vocabulary was not as descriptive as they thought." (photos on page 14)

Jeff Kosow, Physical Education Teacher at Westmount High School, played Connexions with his Leadership Community Action class. Jasmine Ramcharitar led Jeffrey Tavares in constructing a five-piece variation of Connexions. A frustrated Tavares wasn't sure he'd succeed (and that would have been o.k!) by following Ramcharitar's directions.



Leadership Community Action (Westmount High School) students Jeffrey Tavares and Jasmine Ramcharitar have their turn playing Connexions.

When he did, Ramcharitar commented: "It really helps you learn how to communicate clearly."

The broad application of Connexions, spanning from tolerance, acceptance, and

anti-bullying, to leadership, teamwork and building a common language was appreciated by all. Special thanks to Ilana Ben-Ari, Gonzalo Riva, Bobbie Variantzas, Jeff Kosow, Michael Cristofaro, Patrizia Cicarelli, and all EMSB staff and students who played and learnt with us.



Jay Jones-Doyle

The power of your disability

Having a disability can be frightening at times, especially during the elementary and high school years. These are the times when we desire to fit the mold, to be accepted, and perhaps even thought of as cool. Having a disability can affect that process, make you feel different, and perhaps even question your worth to others. This self-deprecating line of thinking, while not uncommon during the teen years, can lead to self-doubt that can persist well into adulthood.

So what, in my opinion, is the key to avoiding this trap of feeling lesser? It requires two simple things. The first is recognizing that, as a minority, you have a golden opportunity. You are extremely influential in the formation of other people's opinions regarding disabled people as a whole. The reason for this is simple: scarcity. If, for example, you have only seen one or two peacocks in your life, your opinion of what they are and how they act is extremely dependent on what you learned from interacting with those one or two creatures. Conversely, if you've seen

thousands of squirrels the actions of one will probably not shift your overall judgment of the species. We, the folks with disabilities, are the peacocks of this world.

The second thing is to find an outlet to help people - because it is extremely empowering. It can be something as simple as actively being involved with a society or group for people with the same or similar impairments as you. Or it can mean volunteering in some capacity in your community (local or virtual). Seeing what a positive impact you can have on others can go a long way towards alleviating doubts regarding self-worth.

For my part I have often said that I would not be the same person if I did not have a disability, and I truly believe it. Being six foot four and athletically built, I would have most likely pursued a more sportive path to success. While I cannot say for certain that one outcome would have been worse or better than the other, I can say that the path would have been fundamentally different.

Since the age of 17 I have been presenting motivational workshops at the National Stuttering Association's annual conferences across the US. I touch upon many things in my speeches, but the central theme is always the same: success is not the outcome of some cut and dry formula, and that the most disabling part of a disability, for most people, is the limits that they impose on themselves. In many cases success is dependent on identifying something you have that others want, need, or recognize value in.

You may think that having a disability sets you apart from others, and perhaps it does. But you know what the big secret is? Al-

most everybody feels apart from the crowd, and they all seek external inspiration to bolster their own feelings of self-worth. Be that inspiration. Show the world that you can succeed with a 'disadvantage' and you will be forever held in high esteem by your peers and colleagues.

Jay Jones-Doyle is an intern with the UN's Business and Biodiversity programme and has recently completed his M.ScA in marketing and environmentally-friendly behaviour at Concordia's John Molson School of Business. 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, as well as on the Inspirations Editorial Board. He is an accomplished motivational speaker, having presented both locally and at the National Stuttering Association's annual conference seven times in eleven years. He is a championship-winning junior hockey coach, enjoys golf, has cerebral palsy, and is the proud father of an eight-year-old boy.

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Participants requested for research: Health care and service systems

GO4KIDDS is a series of research projects about the health, well being, and social inclusion of Canadian children with severe developmental disabilities (DD) and their families. There is currently a Health Care and Service System Utilization Survey intended for parents of children aged 10-16 years who

have a severe DD. The survey is split up into three parts with each part taking between 30-60 minutes. If you complete the survey, you will be sent a \$50 honorarium in appreciation of your time. You can complete the survey online. Go to www.go4kidds.ca to find the link or email us at gohealth@yorku.ca.

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Oral health and your child

■ ■ ■ By Dr. Lori Lieberman ■ ■ ■

Creating a dental home

The creation of a 'dental home' is essential to your child's oral health. It is important to have a primary dental care center that is accessible, comprehensive, family-centered and compassionate. Children can be apprehensive when it comes to going to the dentist so it is ideal to create an environment where your child feels comfortable and is welcomed by familiar faces.

Starting early

The American Academy of Pediatric Dentists recommends that children have their first dental visit at one year old. An exam is done to assess for caries, proper tooth development and general oral health; information about oral hygiene and proper diet should be discussed as well. Every child has unique needs when it comes to oral health and discovering these early on will benefit your child.

Do not avoid the dentist because you fear a difficult appointment. Visits every six months will make your child more familiar with the process and therefore appointments may become easier over time. Also, by going to the dentist often, small carious lesions can be addressed and pain or infection can be prevented.

Diet

Make healthy food choices and limit foods that are high in sugar. Healthy choices that include lots of vegetables, fruits, legumes, lean meat, low-fat dairy and fish will contribute to your child's health. Choose whole fruits instead of fruit juices. The best thing for your children to drink is water! Choose foods that are high in calcium and Vitamin D to build strong teeth. Limit snacking if possible and encourage your children to only snack on foods without added sugar. Sliced veggies, fresh fruit, nuts and seeds, plain yogurt, cottage cheese and peanut butter are all tasty and nutritious options that are good for your body.

Medical Conditions

A variety of medical conditions can cause different oral health concerns. Difficulty with brushing or different dietary habits may lead to increased plaque accumula-

tion. Certain medications can cause a decreased amount of saliva, which can increase caries rate. As well with certain medical conditions, one may find extra or missing teeth as well as spacing and occlusion differences.

Oral Hygiene

Adults should be brushing for a child until they can achieve adequate brushing technique. Regular brushing with fluoridated toothpaste should be done twice daily and flossing should be done once daily. Some children may benefit from the use of an electric toothbrush since it can be more efficient when access is difficult. Supplemental fluoride should be discussed with your dentist.

For more information on healthy eating, visit <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/food-guide-aliment/index-eng.php>. Janna Boloten is a Registered Dietitian and member of l'Ordre professionnel des dietetistes du Québec. "Like" her on Facebook at www.facebook.com/JannaBolotenPDt and check out her nutritious recipes and healthy eating tips.

Dr. Lori Lieberman is a dentist at the Montreal Children's Hospital. The MCH provides a full range of dental services to children who have complicated dental problems and/or medical problems requiring hospital-based dental treatments.





It's not what you are missing... but what you have left that counts

By Michael Lifshitz

In the Spring of 1987, I attended my first War Amputees of Canada Child Amputee Program's (CHAMP) seminar. It was at that seminar that I met Cliff Chadderton, the Chief Executive Officer of the War Amputees of Canada and founder of CHAMP.

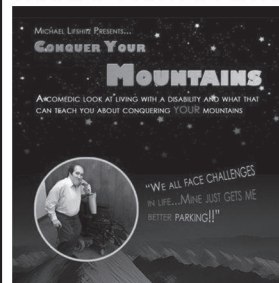
One of Mr. Chadderton's regular messages he always imparted to attendees at seminars was that it is not what the child amputee is missing, but what he has left that counts. While this is advice that would hold true to all people (i.e. focus on what skills and strengths you have, instead of what problems or challenges you face),



it is particularly poignant when talking about children with disabilities, be it an amputation or other types of physical or intellectual challenges. My goal in this article is not to say that life is perfect and with a positive attitude, the challenges a child with special needs faces will simply disappear, but rather that these challenges do not mean the child can't still have a fulfilling and meaningful life.

I am somewhat used to people being surprised by what I can do even though I do use a wheelchair for longer distances. When I moved into my own place and went to discuss financing for the furniture, every salesman was shocked

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to learn that I was disabled and worked. That's okay though because I got even with them. I told them I was a fireman in their neighborhood. Somehow that seemed to worry them.

Having a physical disability from birth, I realized early on that my first career choice of being the starting centre for the Montreal Canadiens was probably not going to happen. This is why I turned to a career in accounting and finance. Thanks to computers, we no longer have to do math with our feet. And now, with new adaptive technologies, teaching methods, and more flexible rules regarding Registered Education Savings Plan (RESP), children with intellectual or learning disabilities can also pursue higher education.

During my time as a financial advisor, I remember being really annoyed when meeting with one woman who had a son with autism. Her financial advisor had convinced her it was pointless to put money aside in an RESP for her son because how would he possibly pursue post secondary education. In speaking with the mother, I found out

that her son was responding well to therapy, and actually showed a real interest and talent for working with his grandfather on painting and renovations. A career program in renovations may very well be the perfect solution for this child. Every child should be given the opportunity to pursue any program they can and develop what they have to their fullest potential.

Disabilities can impose enough limitations... we do not need to allow the preconceived notions of others to add to those limitations.

Michael Lifshitz is a motivational speaker, comedian & author. Born with a condition called Multiple Congenital Musculoskeletal Abnormalities, Michael wears an artificial leg, walks with a cane, and uses an electric wheelchair for longer distances. Using his experiences of growing up with a disability and becoming a successful professional, Michael strives to not only show what people with a disability can accomplish but also to inspire others to overcome their own challenges. Michael can be reached at michael@michaellifshitz.com.



Merci à l'équipe d'Inspirations de contribuer à faire de la métropole un milieu de vie mieux adapté à l'ensemble des familles montréalaises.

Jean-François Lisée

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The Azrieli Foundation and Brain Canada partner to further research into neurodevelopmental disorders

Research advances have dramatically improved our understanding of the fundamental deficits in neuronal communication in many genetic disorders, including Fragile X Syndrome and Rett Syndrome, and the rational application of drugs that may correct these deficits.

The Azrieli Foundation has partnered with Brain Canada and the Government of Canada through the Canada Brain Research Fund to further this exciting research.

With a total investment of \$8.5 million over five years, half from the Azrieli Foundation and half matched through the Brain Canada Foundation's public-private funding model, the Azrieli Neurodevelopmental Research Program will support excellent systems and translational

research in the area of neurodevelopmental disorders, with a special focus on Fragile X syndrome and Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs).

The ultimate goal of this initiative – the largest of its kind ever in Canada – is to develop new diagnostics, treatment and prevention strategies for neurodevelopmental disorders, to reduce their economic and social burden on Canadians, and to improve the quality of life for those affected by neurodevelopmental disorders and their families.

"There has never been a more exciting time to explore, understand and treat neurodevelopmental disorders," said Dr. Naomi Azrieli, Chair and CEO of the Azrieli Foundation. "The tools now available offer an exceptional opportunity to understand the brain as a whole system, and to identify targets and develop and test novel therapies that could

revolutionize treatment. We are confident that this unprecedented investment will encourage the best scientists to come together in multidisciplinary teams and, through innovative work, close the gap between discoveries made in the research lab and clinical treatments."

The Program will support Canadian teams, or the Canadian components of international teams, proposing innovative, collaborative, research projects in the area of neurodevelopmental disorders with a focus on systems and/or translational approaches. Favoured research proposals will focus on Fragile X and ASD. It is expected that at least three teams will be funded, in the range of \$500,000 per year, for five years.

Brain Canada is a registered charity, headquartered in Montreal, and the only national non-profit organization devoted to sup-

porting all neuroscience research. Brain Canada brings together teams of scientists specializing in different disciplines to identify common mechanisms for the repair, restructuring, remodeling and recovery of brain functions, and to translate this knowledge into brain repair and recovery techniques. For information visit www.braincanada.ca.

The Azrieli Foundation's mission is to support and operate a range of initiatives in various fields, including: scientific and medical research; the promotion of excellence in education and access to education; tolerance and Holocaust education; the advancement of excellence in architecture and the arts. For more information visit www.azrielifoundation.org/neurodevelopment.

By Wendy Singer



On April 11th, 2013, John Grant and L.I.N.K.S. High Schools hosted the Transitioning Towards Independence Resource Fair at St. Pius X Adult Education Centre. Forty-eight exhibitors were on hand to meet with the community. Pictured are Dorothy Shaw, Carla Toffoli, Sissi Séguret and Tanya Yankowski.

The Azrieli Foundation is committed to helping children and adults with special needs

Recent initiatives include: Adult Leisure Activities Program at the Miriam Foundation and the Azrieli Neurodevelopmental Research Program





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Scouts Canada builds a better world



By Pamela Feres



Twenty-two-year-old Jonathan Feres has autism and Down syndrome. He also has a kidney defect and neurogenic bladder. But on August 16, 2012 nothing was stopping him from swimming across beautiful Lake Tamaracouta!

Jonathan and his siblings have been attending Scouts Canada's Camp Tamaracouta in Mille Isles, Quebec for many years now. Tamaracouta Scout Reserve is the oldest continuously running Scout Camp in the world, proudly hosting thousands of scouting members from around the globe every year. The camp is situated on 1,000 acres of pristine woodlands in the heart of the lower Laurentians.

Scouts Canada's missions is to contribute to the education of young people, to help build a better world where people are self-fulfilled as individuals and play a constructive role in society. A coed organization, Scouts Canada is committed to encouraging youth with all needs to participate in their

programs to the extent that their need will allow. Adaptation of programs to specifically allow such a youth fuller participation is encouraged and left up to the discretion of the Scouter.

At Camp Tamaracouta, differences are embraced and applauded. The camp staff work hard to ensure everyone is seen as equal and capable. It is a place where children can learn important life lessons.

Swimming in the lake is one of Jonathan's favorite activities. My family and I were thrilled when Barbara Webster, camp nurse, organized a lake swim event that would provide him with a very unique opportunity to swim across the approximately 1.3 kilometer lake without a lifejacket in just one hour. Jonathan was joined in the water by friends and camp staff. Many more cheered him on from the docks.

Jonathan's challenges do not stop him from doing his very best and living his life. The

lake swim is a perfect example of how youth with special needs can accomplish extraordinary things with a little help, support, and love from others. Without Scouts Canada's Camp Tamaracouta and its wonderful staff, Jonathan would never have had such an incredible opportunity to challenge himself and accomplish such a feat.

While Camp Tamaracouta is not a specialized camp for youth with special needs, they accommodate several special needs campers over the summer in their day camp and overnight camp programs.

Families are encouraged to speak with the camp director and/or local group commissioners to see if their child's needs could be met appropriately in the Scouting program. Families can contact Scouts Canada's Que-



Jonathan and friends at Camp Tamaracouta.
(Photo courtesy of Kristen Whitelaw)

bec Councils at 514-334-3004 or www.scouts.ca. Contact Camp Tamaracouta at 1-866-438-4096 or visit www.tamaracouta.com.



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WMRC caregivers must offer users a welcoming home environment and may host as many as four users at a time. The specific needs of each user must be met in collaboration with WMRC employees. Please note that the caregiver is responsible for providing the home, which must be located in the West Island or central/southwestern Montreal.

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George's Story: A glimpse into the supported employment program at Ometz

By Edina Markovitz

Many years ago, George graduated from high school in special education. For the next 10 years, he was on welfare, and spent most days watching television or accompanying his mother to the local convenience store. Quiet and cooperative, George did not have the skills to do independent job searching, nor did his family know of potential resources to help him.

A family friend told George's mother about the Supported Employment Program (SEP) at Ometz. Serving the island of Montreal including the West Island, SEP helps individuals with intellectual challenges, learning disabilities, autism

spectrum disorders and/or mental health diagnoses secure paid employment. The program is funded by Emploi Québec.

An SEP Employment Specialist from Ometz met with George and did a full assessment of his abilities. Having expressed an interest in wanting to work in a retail environment, he was tested on his work productivity, dexterity, concentration and other work-related skills. SEP offers various services including skills assessment, CV writing, interview preparation and accompaniment, job placement, on-the-job-training and assistance with job maintenance.

George's Employment Specialist approached the local convenience store he often frequented, and hence knew so well, with the proposition of hiring George. Emploi Québec provided a renewable salary subsidy to compensate for George's lack of

experience and cover the additional training needed for him to learn the job of placing and bagging merchandise.

His Employment Specialist accompanied him to his interview and for the initial training. Seven years later, George is still employed there! He feels happy and productive and Ometz still follows up with him and his employer to ensure all continues to go well on both sides.

For more information about SEP at Ometz, please call 514-342-0000 ext. 3377 or e-mail info@ometz.ca.

Edina Markovitz is the Manager – Supported Employment Services at Ometz.



Apps for creating interactive social stories

By Andrea Prupas

The use of social stories is an effective strategy to improve an individual's understanding of a specific situation or event. Now social story creation has gone high-tech! Mobile devices and specialized apps have revolutionized how parents and educators write social stories and also provides the opportunity for students to write their own social stories easily.

We would like to highlight three effective apps for creating social stories. For more information on writing social stories, please visit: <http://www.thegraycenter.org>.

StoryMaker (\$29.99 US). StoryMaker is an app that allows you to create stories quickly and easily. Text and graphics can be customized using the library of pictures within the app or with your own pictures from your camera. After your story has been created, it can be e-mailed as a PDF or printed. A few unique features: the ability to add multiple photos to a page in the story rather than just one, and the inclusion of model stories by Carol Gray, the original creator of social stories. The app has been field tested in both homes and schools.

Pictello (\$18.99 US). This multipurpose app is one of our all-time favorites. It can be used for social stories, visual schedules, talking photo albums, and digital stories. The app does not contain a picture library but allows you to add your own photos to customize a story. "Wizard mode"

walks you through a simple process using a pre-structured template. There are many options for sharing stories with other Pictello users (Dropbox, Pictello sharing server) and also non-Pictello users (export to a PDF). Text-to-speech with word highlighting is available in 50 different voices in 23 languages, or simply record your own voice when creating your story.

ShowMe (free). For something a little different that provides a unique and creative approach to developing social stories, ShowMe is an "interactive whiteboard" app that allows you to create social stories or social concepts through drawing. Designed

originally for creating tutorials, we've found it especially effective for teachers and parents working with students on social skills. The app allows you to record your own voice as you draw an idea, concept or social story. Most interesting is the collaborative aspect associated with this app; teachers and parents can share social stories through an online community.

Andrea Prupas is the co-founder of *inov8 Educational Consulting*, which provides individualized consultations and presentations for families and schools on highly effective assistive technology tools. For information visit www.inov8-ed.com.



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Small Steps: Ometz offers occupational and speech therapy services to kids with developmental challenges in a friendly camp environment

By Deborah Groper

For a second year, Ometz has partnered with Friendly Faces day camp and McGill University to offer Small Steps, a program designed to provide occupational and speech therapy services to children between the ages of four to eight years. As part of their camp experience at Friendly Faces, children who experience mild to moderate developmental delays receive specialized services designed to blend with fun filled summer activities such as arts and crafts, land sports, exciting field trips and barbecues.

The goal of Small Steps is to help children build confidence in communication, foster peer relationships and enhance social skills in a joyful atmosphere. Over a seven-week period, Ometz's Occupational Therapists and Speech-Language Pathologists, and McGill Masters students work in close collaboration with Friendly Faces camp staff.

Thanks to this innovative partnership between McGill University, Friendly Faces and Ometz, families now have access to Small Steps at no additional cost. The program benefits from an ideal therapy environment which has been generously provided by the YM-YWHA Ben Weider Jewish Community Center. Small Steps is a unique program that brings together specialized services with a wonderful and memorable camp experience for children.

For more information regarding eligibility contact Dr. Franzina Coutinho, program coordinator, 514-224-7897 or Deborah Groper, program manager, Ometz, 514-342-0000, #3420.



The Special Needs Department at the Ben Weider JCC

By Julie Longval

The Special Needs Department offers a wide range of activities to individuals of all ages with special needs. We service a wide range of disabilities from intellectual challenges, mental health, dual diagnostic, physical disabilities to Autism spectrum. The majority of our clientele is Jewish and English speaking, and are referred to us from Agence Ometz, CLSCs, the Jewish General & St-Mary's Hospitals, Forward House Inc., the Douglas Hospital, Miriam Home, Up House Inc., etc. Over the years, the Y has become their home away from home for many of our participants. They feel welcomed, empowered and appreciated here at the Y.

Some of the programs offered include:

Club Rendez-Vous/Drop-in: Meets on Mondays & Wednesdays (11-1:00pm). Participants are served lunch followed

by optional leisure activities for our clientele with chronic mental health issues. On Wednesdays, following lunch, participants enjoy playing Bingo, which is animated by a volunteer.

"Open Studio" & "Mixed Media" visual art classes are held on Tuesdays & Wednesdays from 6:00 – 8:00pm. The highlight of each semester is the "Art Exhibition", where students show their artwork. They look forward to it with pride and excitement.

Sunday Fun in the Gym program (four to 12yrs): This program engages children in proprio-perceptive activities in the gym followed by a swimming program. Each participant is assigned a facilitator to promote the development of the child's abilities. This program is well appreciated by parents, participants and staff. The challenge is to reduce the waitlist without impacting the quality of the program.

Yedidut program services teenagers (13 to 18yrs) and is held on Sundays. This pro-

gram is an extension of the Sunday Fun program. A group of teenagers meet in a familiar environment to participate in group games, fitness activities and to socialize amongst themselves. Each week, the physical activities are followed by a swim period in the pool.

Horizons/Manhigim Day Camp programs are funded in part by Canada Summer Jobs grant, the AlterGo grant and Y Cycle for Special Needs and registration fees. The campers (four to 12yrs) registered in the Horizons program are fully integrated into the Friendly Faces Day Camp regular program. Each camper with special needs takes part in regular programs and activities. The campers are supported by shadows to ease their inclusion in the group and they actively participate in activities according to their own pace and abilities.

For more information, contact Julie Longval, Special Needs Coordinator, 514-737-8628, #235.

Continued from page 14

Playing on purpose

We often say that play is a metaphor for how we learn, work, and live. Kids and adults need to explore various territories and ways of thinking in order to find their passions and skills, but school doesn't always open up the landscape for that search. Play does, and a movement for play-based learning can harness that power. That's why we do this work. That's why we keep playing.

We hope you keep playing, too.

Ilana and Gonzalo lead the team at Twenty One Toys, designing toys and developing guidebooks, videos, and supplementary resources to make facilitating a toy-based workshop (or quickly sneaking play into learning) as easy as possible. From summer camps and corporate retreats, to special needs programs and mainstream classrooms, they keep discovering where play can bring fresh eyes to old problems. Recently, they've seen their toys used within the EMSB – at Gerald McShane Elementary, Westmount High School and Philip E. Layton / MAB-Mackay.



Côte Saint-Luc's Action Plan for the Disabled: Going the extra mile

By Zachary Rath

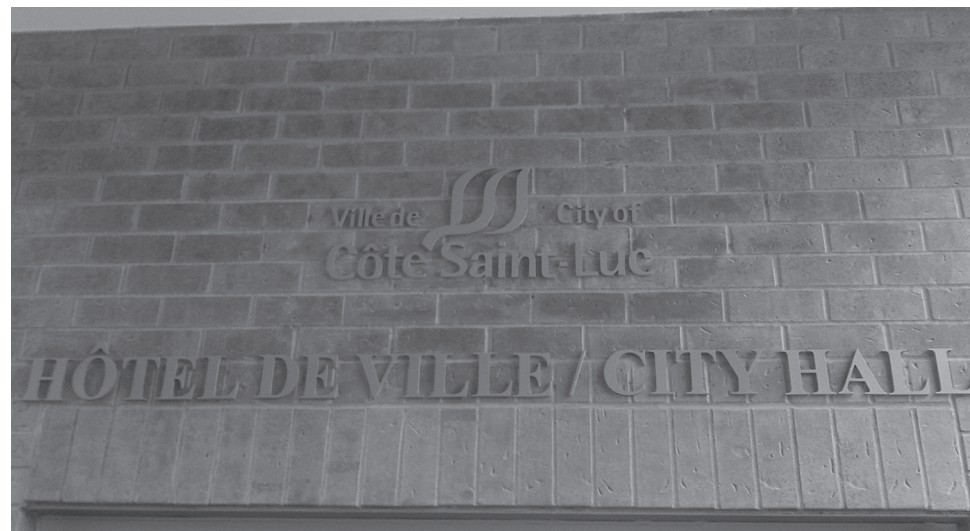
As it is the third largest municipality on the island of Montreal, the City of Côte Saint-Luc (CSL) takes enormous pride in setting high standards when it comes to the integrity and safety of its population.

Three years ago, the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (OPHQ) gave CSL a friendly reminder that the city needed to produce a yearly action plan for the disabled. This requirement concerns all municipalities with at least 15,000 inhabitants. The inception of this law (Law 56 - Article 61.1) came about in 2005 after the Commissions des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse discovered that discrimination and general lack of amenities for people

with disabilities was the second highest type of complaint around Montreal.

CSL embraced the idea of further helping the disabled and appointed Urban Planning Manager Jeff Davey to oversee the growth and transition of this action plan. Davey makes sure to involve himself as much as he can and understands the plan's significance, "I think it's a very important aspect to focus on for cities, whether they need to produce a plan or not." Those are not simply words from the city's representative as CSL took plenty of action in 2012.

Highlights include the installation of two sonar crosswalk devices (first of their kind for the city) at the corner of Côte Saint-Luc Road and Westminster, and at the corner of



*The City of Côte Saint-Luc implements a comprehensive action plan for the disabled.
(Photo credit, Zachary Rath)*

Kildare and Parkhaven. Other contributions include a total of 24 new access ramps at key locations in the Cavendish Mall Development area, making sure there is 100 percent accessibility for those with reduced mobility.

Another achievement was when the Côte Saint-Luc Aquatic and Community Centre (ACC) opened its doors. The state of the art facility includes an accessible environment for all users, including an indoor recreational pool that has a ramp and special equipment.

CSL continues to offer the Programme d'Adaptation de Domicile (PAD). This gives disabled residents access to renovation grants so that they can adapt their homes to their specific needs. This past year, a total of 11 renovation projects were completed by

taking advantage of such grants.

Keeping with the accessibility mode, the Eleanor London Côte Saint-Luc Public Library goes the extra mile and specifically trains its staff on how to serve patrons who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing.

Expect more from CSL this year as the city hopes to create a committee that will brainstorm and implement programs to ensure further accessibility for everyone. "I'm hoping for another big year in 2013. Little things can often make a big difference, and with an older population it's that much more important," said Davey.

Zachary Rath can be heard weekday mornings on K103FM Radio.

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- The Risk of Addiction in Youth with ADHD/LD – Anna Cegiela, MSW
- There's an App for That! New Assistive Technologies for Students with ADHD/LD – Andrea Prupas M.A.
- The Nurtured Heart Approach for Parents: Fostering Success for Challenging Children & Teens with ADHD/LD & PDD – Linda Aber, Certified Theraplay Group Specialist & Sheila Ostroff, M.A. They both are Nurtured Heart Advanced Trainers
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A Snapshot of Our Special Needs Community



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In Memory of Beverly Baserman



The late Beverly Baserman and Robbie Kazazz.

On January 1, 2013, we lost a dedicated educator, mentor, and friend, Beverly Baserman, the director of the Lansdowne Tutoring Centre. Beverly adapted her teaching of reading and writing to fit the child's way of understanding the world. This was particularly important for children with learning disabilities.

As well as teaching the student, she was able to provide helpful suggestions to families regarding their child. Beverly's greatest gift was her ability to identify the children's difficulty, design a program that would meet their needs, and guide them to reach their full potential. Flexibility and genuine caring were the cornerstones of her approach.

Beverly always tried to make the Lansdowne lessons enjoyable for her students. She practiced phonics with her home-made phonics games. She wanted her students to feel good

about themselves and to have fun. The students felt her unshakable conviction that they would learn to read and write. The joy of learning was inextricably linked to the joy of simply being with Beverly.

One of Beverly's main concerns since Lansdowne's inception 41 years ago was to support the bursary program which provides funds for families who are not able to pay the full fees. In memory of Beverly, an ongoing program has been set up in her name. Contributions to the Beverly Baserman Bursary Fund can be made in person or by telephone at 514-487-6516.

For information visit www.thelansdowne-centre.org.

Ulli Elia on behalf of the Lansdowne staff.

New Principal at Yaldei School

Congratulations to Caryn Shacter, who was recently appointed principal of École Yaldei. This private school in the public interest serves children, aged four to eight years with profound intellectual handicaps. Through their affiliation with the Donald Berman Yaldei Developmental Center, they offer a comprehensive educational program that follows the MELS Curriculum for the Profoundly Handicapped and associated and related therapies, all under one roof. Ms. Shacter has been an educator in special education for 40 years and was the principal at REACH (Riverside School Board) for six years.



Vanessa Clarke, Caryn Shacter, Adriana Slutsky with students Leah and Millie.



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A new direction for Girl Guides of Canada Embracing and managing differently abled girls

By Lori Rubin

The Quebec Sisterhood of Girl Guides of Canada proudly states: "If we work together towards a common goal, we can achieve great things. We are here for the girls, we are here for each other. That's what makes guiding fun and it's what keeps us coming back for more."

With that lofty goal in mind, on a snowy Saturday morning in January at a symposium at Champlain College in St. Lambert, three professionals from the Student Services Department of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) addressed a few hundred Guiders (leaders of Sparks, Brownies, Girl Guides, Pathfinders and Rangers) on the topic of inclusion.

Tania Piperni (Autism Spectrum Disorders Consultant), Liliane Yiptong (Special Education Consultant) and myself were proud to represent the EMSB in a one-hour collaborative presentation followed by a 75-minute breakout session that was designed to delve deeper into the 'hows' and 'whys' of girls with behavioural challenges, learning difficulties or those on the autism spectrum.

Girl Guides of Canada – Guides du Canada has a long-standing reputation for offering engaging and stimulating programs and activities to girls from the age of five to the teen years and beyond. Typically, girls participate in activities related to nature, health and fitness, sports and recreation, involvement in their community, cooking and sewing, music, and a myriad of crafts, to name but a few. They get together one evening a week, and often choose to join in community events, fundraisers, or attend camps that take place on weekends or during school holidays.

Guiders are selfless, passionate volunteers from every age group and from every walk of life. They have enormous hearts and open minds, and are committed to "giving back" to the community by teaching girls a variety of useful, interesting skills that in most cases, stay with them throughout their lifespan.

As is often the case in classroom situations, some girls have social/behavioural, learning or developmental challenges that make it



Enthusiastic participants at the 2013 Guider Symposium at Champlain College, focusing on including girls with special needs.

difficult for them, their peers and their leaders to know how to best address their needs and how to ensure a successful guiding experience. For girls with these exceptionalities, spending time in a cooperative group situation, following the rules, norms and routines of an organization, and/or exercising good listening and communication skills, can prove to be a frustrating experience, especially after a full day at school.

In an admirable effort to acquire a deeper understanding of how to include/engage girls with special needs into their groups, Tania, Liliane and I suggested ways to equip the Guiders with practical strategies that they could implement at their next meeting. Some recommendations include using visual prompts, breaking strings of instructions down into smaller chunks, using strategic thinking in deciding where to place the girls in their sub groups, and reducing transition time from one activity to the next.

Girl Guides of Canada – Guides du Canada have always opened up their hearts and minds to all girls who enjoy each other's company in a recreational setting. Now more than ever they have the tools at their disposal to make true inclusion of girls with special needs a reality.

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



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L'Association de Montréal pour la déficience intellectuelle (AMDI) : vous gagnez à mieux nous connaître !

Fondée en 1935, par un groupe de parents pour qui il était essentiel d'offrir une vie « normale » à leur enfant ayant une déficience intellectuelle, l'AMDI est la plus ancienne association dédiée à la déficience intellectuelle. L'AMDI a mis sur pied l'École Peter Hall, ainsi que de nombreux services spécialisés : ateliers de travail, résidences et camps de vacances.

C'est en grande partie grâce aux activités bénéfiques (Soirée-Théâtre Janine Sutto, Défi Janine Sutto) et aux dons charitables, que l'Association de Montréal pour la déficience intellectuelle (AMDI) continue à offrir des services à ses membres et à répondre à leurs besoins.

La raison d'être de l'AMDI est de favoriser la participation sociale des adultes ayant une déficience intellectuelle et d'offrir des services de soutien aux familles dans l'exercice de leurs responsabilités face à un proche ayant une déficience intellectuelle. De l'éducation à l'autonomie en passant par l'intégration et la sensibilisation, nous mettons tout en œuvre afin de réaliser notre mission.

L'AMDI sort aussi de ses murs afin de favoriser au maximum la participation

sociale de ses membres. Organisation de voyages, de fins de semaine plein air, d'activités comme Quoi faire à Montréal ?, d'ateliers comme Âgissons destiné à mieux s'adapter aux étapes liées au vieillissement, l'AMDI s'affaire à offrir une panoplie d'activités qui sauront plaire à ses membres.

Pour plus d'infos : www.amdi.info.

By Nathalie Goudreau



Des membres de l'AMDI lors du voyage à Baie St-Paul.

The Montréal Association for the Intellectually Handicapped (MAIH): it's worth your while to get to know us better!

Founded in 1935, the Montréal Association for the Intellectually Handicapped (MAIH) is the oldest association dedicated to intellectual disability in Canada. The MAIH started The Peter Hall School, and pioneered the first workshops, residential services and recreational services such as camping and sporting activities in Montréal.

The mission of the MAIH is to promote the social participation of adults with an intellectual handicap and to provide support services to families with an intel-

lectually handicapped family member. The MAIH is greatly dependent on its fundraising activities (Soirée-Théâtre Janine Sutto, The Janine Sutto Challenge) and charitable donations in order to continue to provide services to its members and to respond to their needs.

They use any and all means to fulfill our mission, helping our members with an intellectual handicap learn to become more independent, finding or creating opportunities to facilitate their social integration and raising public awareness about intellectual disability.

The MAIH reaches far and wide to actively foster the social participation of its intellectually handicapped members, from organized travel groups, weekends in the country, activities like What's Happening in Montréal? to workshops like Let's Get Ready, which prepares aging members to become seniors. The MAIH continues to pursue initiatives to improve or innovate the wide array of activities offered to their members.

For information visit www.amdi.info.



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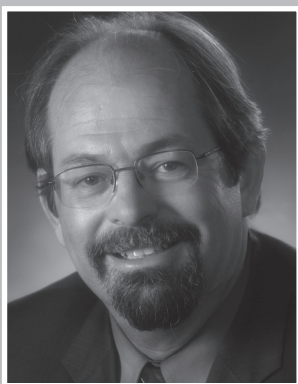
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The Mackay Centre School's 'Leaders on Wheels'

By Daniel Smajovits

Westmount High School has long been known for their leadership class, a group of Secondary 5 students whom not only represent their school, but also take on challenges throughout the community.

However, when it comes to helping out those in need, there is always room for more. As such, these community veterans were eager to allow their peers to wheel onto the scene. Leaders on Wheels, composed of students from the satellite class of the Mackay Centre School located at Westmount High School, was created in September and has already made a significant impact.

Initiated by teacher Dana Strohl, the Lead-

ers on Wheels program consists of 12 students, aged 14 to 20, with various physical and learning disabilities. Beginning with their first project, a Peace Day Celebration in September at the Mackay Centre, the students have also helped teachers coordinate the annual Terry Fox Run, a Halloween Party, and "Bake Sale for Love". On a weekly basis, they read with Kindergarten students at the Mackay Center School.

"We are a group of people helping and inspiring others to make a change," said Neville Blair, one of the 12 Mackay Leaders on Wheels students.

"It starts in the class; it will come out of the



Leaders on Wheels leadership group from the MacKay Centre School Satellite class at Westmount High School. (Photo courtesy of Dana Strohl)

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class and change the environment around us," added Sam Chate, a MacKay leadership student.

Perhaps the most significant project of the school year has been the long-term goal to fundraise for Free the Children, an organization tasked with the mandate of providing education, health, water and alternative incomes to children throughout the world.

To ensure success, Leaders on Wheels decided to team up with their comrades at Westmount High School to jointly begin the "We Create Change" project. With the goal of raising funds to directly benefit the building of water wells for Free the Children, students have collected pennies on the first day of every month as well as sold hand-crafted bracelets.

The two leadership groups initiated "How will you change the world" and "Paint it New". The Leaders made bracelets with a string, a penny, a blue bead and a safety pin. The penny symbolized that one action, one person, can make a difference. The blue bead symbolized their water projects and the safety pin symbolized how the students are all connected.

The Leaders took part in Mackay's second annual Project "Acts Of Kindness"; inspiring youth and adults at the two schools to be kind. Each person made a commitment to do one specific act of kindness for an entire week, in hopes that these acts of kindness will inspire a domino effect and contribute to a more compassionate world. This week of kindness incorporated Free the Children's "Vow of Silence", sending kindness to those who have no voice in this world because of injustice.



Team Mackay. (Photo courtesy of Dana Strohl)

Leaders on Wheels are committed to inspiring their community to make this world a better place, and show that anyone, regardless of ability or disability, has it in them to be change makers!



Preparing students for the world of work

Work-oriented training path offered at John Grant and L.I.N.K.S. high schools

By Stuart Nulman

The transition from the academic world to the working world is not always an easy one. That's the case for students who have special needs or have had difficulties integrating into a mainstream school atmosphere, let alone the world of steady employment.

That is why John Grant High School in Côte Saint-Luc and L.I.N.K.S. High School in Ahuntsic introduced the Work-Oriented Training Path (WOTP) program in 2010. L.I.N.K.S. was formerly known as Paul VI.

"The program was brought in to give special needs students who were working in a closed classroom environment a type of certification that was ministry recognized, and would prepare them for the world of work," said James Fequet, who is principal of both schools.

The WOTP program is open to students at both schools who are 15 years old as of Sep-

tember 30 of the current school year, and comprises two components.

The first is a pre-work training component, which runs for three years. The first year concentrates on the classroom, where students take academic courses such as core English and French, as well as history and science. They also take work skills courses such as woodshop, crafts, hair salon, day-care, kitchen and horticulture, so that they can get practical exposure to a work environment. In the second year, students engage in a work study stage placement once a week at a variety of employers who are affiliated with both schools. In year three, students spend three days a week in the work force, along with taking courses dealing with how to write a resume, how to properly search for a job, proper conduct in a job interview and travel training, in which they are taught how to use public transit. Upon successful completion, students receive a Pre-work Training Certificate from the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports (MELS).



James Fequet, Principal of John Grant and L.I.N.K.S. High Schools.

The second component is the Job Opportunity Program (JOP), which lasts for one year and is open to students between the ages of 18 and 21. Students prepare themselves for the job market by focussing on a particular semi-skilled trade such as auto mechanics or hair dressing, and is rewarded with a MELS Semi-Skilled Trade certificate upon successful completion. If the student does not complete the course within the year -- or would like get a certificate in another trade that is offered -- they are allowed to return to the program until they are 21.

Fequet is amazed at the progress of the students who take one or both programs, especially how it affects their skills and confidence. "Both programs give them focus and a goal to achieve. They have something concrete that they can work towards and it really focuses their attention and minimizes the distractions that they've had before. It gives them something to be confident and proud of," he said. "Ninety-nine percent of the students really enjoy their workplaces. They're happy that they're working at something they can be good at and they feel more fulfilled that they can actually go out there and apply a skill that they know how to do."

For more information about the Work-Oriented Training Path program, please call John Grant High School at 514-484-4161 or L.I.N.K.S. High School at 514-723-2845.

JGHS

John Grant
High School

PAUL VI becomes L.I.N.K.S.

The 2012-2013 academic year has marked a new beginning for Paul VI High School in Ahuntsic, as it is now officially known as L.I.N.K.S. High School.

L.I.N.K.S., which stands for Literacy, Interdependence, Networking, Knowledge and Success, was chosen due to the tremendous changes and improvements over the past two years at the school, which has led to a substantial increase in enrolment. Over the past two years, the school has adopted the WOTP (Work Oriented Training Path), as well as food preparation, wood-working, photography and videography courses.

L.I.N.K.S. is an alternative high school providing quality educational programs to students from ages 13 to 21 who have been diagnosed with learning difficulties. Since its founding in 1979, L.I.N.K.S. has offered a unique opportunity for special needs students to develop their fundamental academic competencies while benefitting from a variety of work skills and daily living skill classes. James Fequet is the principal of L.I.N.K.S. and John Grant High School in Côte Saint-Luc. Log on to the new school website at www.emsb.qc.ca/links.

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BDO





Clinical psychologist Dr. Reggie Melrose provides insights on neuroscience

By Despina Vassiliou, Katherine Snow and Kate Marien

California-based Dr. Regalina Melrose has been spending a lot of time with the EMSB lately. Staff from a number of EMSB schools have been gathering to listen to her. She has presented four times at the EMSB in four months and more workshops are scheduled. The topic: how to implement self-regulation in the school setting.

Dr. Melrose is a clinical and school psychologist. One of her specializations is in helping teachers and parents to understand and apply the vast amount of new information that is being discovered in the fields of neuroscience.

Dr. Melrose is a compelling speaker – she literally bounces around the room, talking not only with her voice, but with her whole body and her facial expressions. She drives her points home with the occasional arabesque and it is very evident that she is passionate about her subject. Her message is clear; educators and parents need to understand the current research in neuroscience as it pertains to a student's ability to learn.

In her talk, Dr. Melrose provides a simplified version of neuroanatomy and explains the chemistry of an over-alarmed brain (a brain that has experienced repeated stress), and why that brain is unable to accept and process information in an efficient way.

Being an educator herself, she understands that many of our students come to school either inadequately rested and/or in an alarmed state, which makes it difficult for

them to learn. She has developed a system that can help these students to be ready to learn. By taking the time to do what Dr. Melrose calls the “60 seconds”, we train our bodies to return to the optimal zone of arousal; that is the optimal zone to learn and function. Dr. Melrose's 60 seconds consist of five components where an individual is encouraged to take a moment and become aware of what is happening in his or her body. The five components are as follows: (1) feel your feet on the ground; (2) take deep breaths through the nose; (3) visualize something or someplace that has soothing effect on you (e.g., a scene from nature); (4) feel the support of the chair holding you up; and (5) notice how your body feels.

The goal of the 60 seconds is for the students to return to the optimal zone of arousal and achieve a neurochemical balance in the brain. Once that is achieved then the student is ready to learn.

Dr. Melrose's system, although primarily based on helping children with behavioural needs, can be applied to all children as there are no known negative effects of doing the 60 seconds. One can also extrapolate from what Dr. Melrose says to benefit children with special needs as well. Children with special needs may be placed in an alarmed state more frequently than others, particularly if they have physical challenges that result in hospitalizations or being bullied. Dr. Melrose's 60 seconds can help children and adults return to that optimal



Dr. Reggie Melrose speaking at St. Monica's Elementary School.
(Photo credit, Julie Hobbs)

zone, how to self-regulate their feelings, and thus place them in a better position to learn and function.

Despina Vassiliou is an EMSB psychologist, Katherine Snow is the principal at St. Monica Elementary School, and Kate Marien works at Elizabeth Ballantyne Elementary School.

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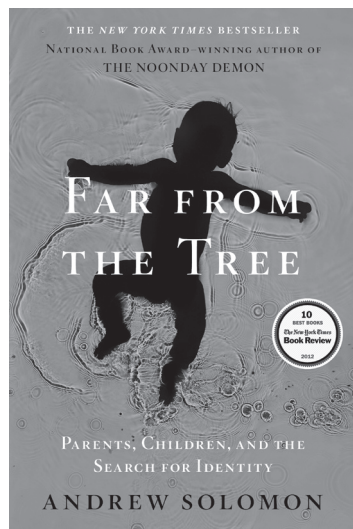
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Inspirational Book Review

Far From the Tree: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity by Andrew Solomon (Scribner, \$39.99)

By Stuart Nulman

with special needs. The challenges are many; there are feelings of frustration, isolation and prejudice that go along with the feelings of love, accomplishment and triumph; and most of all, the resources that should be available to help them can be scarce, prohibitively expensive and sometimes nonexistent; and there are times when the challenges and burdens of raising a special needs child becomes so overwhelming that it ends in tragedy.

Solomon's argument, which serves as the book's foundation, is that there are two types of identities that form the genetic relationship between parent and child: vertical identity (i.e., ethnicity, skin colour, religion, language, nationality) and horizontal identity (i.e., physical disabilities, emotional and psychological issues,

recessive genes, random mutations, etc.). In the latter category, Solomon deals with deafness, dwarfism, Down syndrome, autism and disabilities.

Each chapter is well balanced between detailed outlines of the special need in particular and the testimonies of parents and children who have lived through the trials and tribulations of the special need in question. And it's the personal testimonials that give the book its human face. We learn that raising a child with special needs is one of the loneliest, difficult, yet most fulfilling tasks a parent can experience. There's the lack of compassion that's felt by the parent and child from the social service and medical professions; the limited support and resources available; and above all, the endless love by the parents, and most important, their acceptance of who their children are.





For example, there's Betsy Goodwin, who after she was told by her obstetrician to institutionalize her newborn son Carson who has Down syndrome, teamed up with her friend, social worker Arden Moulton, to form the National Down Syndrome Society; and there's Jae Davis, whose son Chris was born with autism, who was so determined to have him communicate effectively, she developed on her own several innovative teaching methods that helped future generations of autistic children communicate.

Far From the Tree is a valuable, important work that brings to light the cold hard facts of what certain special needs and disabilities are all about, as well as the human toll that fall onto the families that are directly affected by them. It's an indispensable education and support group neatly brought together in a comprehensive 960-page book.

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Arts and Entertainment



Love Trek: The Final Frontier

■ ■ ■ By Wendy Singer ■ ■ ■

Have you ever wondered what would happen if your favourite television characters from Star Trek, The Love Boat, Fantasy Island, Gilligan's Island – and Dr. Seuss found themselves in the same boat at the same time? The I Can Dream Theatre Group revealed the answer at their premiere musical production, Love Trek: The Final Frontier.

The I Can Dream Theatre Group was created in August 2011 to give young adults with special needs the opportunity to develop their talents in the area of the performing arts while promoting commitment, responsibility and self-confidence.

The 17 actor/singer/dancers delivered laugh out loud funny dialogue and lyrics sung on pitch. I marveled at the skill and humour of the creative team (writer and director Ada Masciarelli, musical director and choreographer Michele Matthews, and production manager Tricia

Bartley) and how each cast member's talents were so masterfully showcased. The audience was treated to a wonderful selection of treasured songs like Banana Boat, Barbara Ann and Hallelujah.

Of notable mention were leads Steven Atme as Dr. Bones McCoy and Andrew Perez as Mr. Spock, both alumni of the Summit School Players. Each actor deserves props for their ability to have fun and portray their characters with remarkable likeness. It was clear that beyond their outstanding performances, this troupe had a great time entertaining their audience.

Look out for their next performance in October 2013.

I Can Dream Theatre Group serves individuals with special needs aged 16 and over in the English speaking community of the Greater Montreal area. For information: icandreamtheatre@gmail.com.



Actors performing a scene from Love Trek: The Final Frontier. (Photo courtesy of I Can Dream Theatre Group)

Robin Hood

■ ■ ■ By Leigh Janson Cooke ■ ■ ■

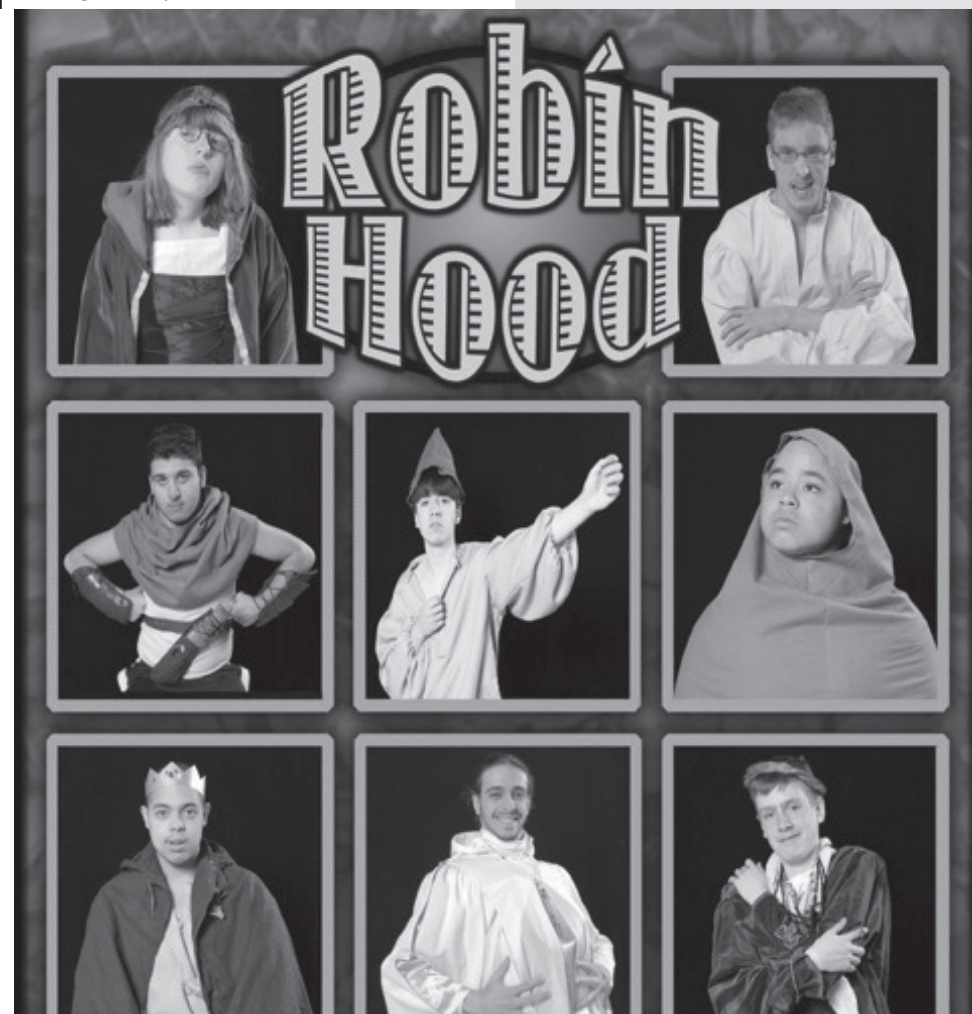
For the last five years, the Montreal Children's Theatre has been providing a safe place for children and teens on the autism spectrum to develop performance skills, make friends, have fun and express their creativity. The Senior Starlight Players meet weekly, and know the pride that comes from creating a show from the ground up.

Last year, this talented group put on public performances of Robin Hood at the National Theatre School and Theatre St. Catherine. Both performances offered audiences a show that was funny, witty, and inspiring. This year, the Starlight Players will return to the Na-

tional Theatre School to perform Sleep, an original piece of theatre created especially for this group.

Theatre is a wonderful tool that allows all children to discover strengths and overcome inhibitions. Becoming a new character gives them a fun way to explore and express their emotions, and performing builds pride and self-confidence. The Montreal Children's Theatre witnesses the success of their innovative program each year on the smiling faces of parents, teachers, and students alike.

Robin Hood actors in costume. (Photo credit, Kirk Lee Foon)





Arts and Entertainment



Inside Regarding Disability Film Festival

By Andrea Di Tomaso - Arts & Entertainment Editor



Eddie McGee, lead actor in *The Human Race*, Andrea Di Tomaso, and Trip Hope, producer of *The Human Race*.

A year in the making, and the brain-child of Thomas Henderson, Director of CRISPESH and Dr. Tara Flanagan, chair of the Joint Board Senate Subcommittee on people with disabilities at McGill University, *Un regard sur le handicap* – Regarding Disability film festival was the first of its kind in Quebec. The focus was to promote community awareness, artistic appreciation and inclusiveness for special needs and disabled people in all aspects of the film industry.

The festival took place from March 21 to March 28 2013, with screenings of local and international films, a welcome gala reception, and other events in conjunction with the festival including panel discussions and a weekend workshop on video production and animation.

All films were shown in independent theatres across Montreal that are wheelchair accessible and had either infrared listening systems for the hearing impaired, ASL (American

Sign Language) and LSQ (langue des signes québécoise) interpreters, or audio description for the visually impaired.

If you didn't get a chance to get out to the festival, you're in luck. Here is a taste of some of the great films shown this year:

The Human Race (language and subtitles: English) is a prime example that inclusiveness is possible in today's Hollywood films without making disability the focal point. This sci-fi horror flick, stars a diverse cast of people, old and young, disabled and non-disabled, who are suddenly taken from their everyday lives and transported somewhere unknown. Hearing the rules booming in their heads they are forced to participate in a terrifying and horrific competition where you must race or die. The award-winning film has toured numerous festivals across the globe including Fantasia Montreal in the summer of 2012.

Défi Peru (language and subtitles: French)

Peru is a beautiful and wild country, home to the Amazon rainforest, the Andes mountain range and amazing heritage sites. Six young adults with Down syndrome partnered with six university students to travel from Montreal to Peru to walk the Inca Trail together, visit the mystical holy ruins of Machu Picchu and live with the Andean people. Pushed to the limits of their minds and bodies, these young people show us how adaptable and persistent one can be to achieve one's dreams in the face of adversity. This film marks the five-year anniversary of this incredible project.

An Evening of Shorts: Art, Animation and Autism (language and subtitles: English) is a blended informative and entertaining introduction to the creative thoughts and actions of autistic people. Beginning with a short presentation on autistic artists by researcher, Michelle Dawson, we learn about the ways that the autistic and non-autistic can meet intellectually through art and creativity, followed by *Breaking Boundaries*, a short documentary on the life and works of visual artist Alex Masket. We were then treated to a collection of funny and sometimes serious animated shorts by talented cartoon animators, Eric Bent, John Eran-Tasker, Ian Swearingen, and Drew Morton Goldsmith.

What did I learn after a week's worth of intense and inspiring films? That expressing oneself through art is a universal human ability that should be shared with the world. Let's hope that *Un regard sur le handicap* – Regarding Disability returns next year with another great lineup of exciting, inclusive and innovative films.

For more information on *Un regard sur le handicap* – Regarding Disability film festi-



Co-directors of the Regarding Disability film festival Thomas Henderson and Dr. Tara Flanagan.

val please visit the website at: <http://sites.google.com/site/unregardsurlehandicap> or find them on Facebook at <http://www.facebook.com/UnRegardSurLeHandicapRegardingDisability>.



Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen

ALBANY, NEW YORK

Shopping in the United States has always been a delight for my family and I, especially with our dollar close to par with the American greenback. Albany, the capital of the State of New York, is just under four hours from Montreal by car and the home of the large Crossgates Mall and the smaller, but equally impressive Colonie Center.

We recently spent four days in Albany. With a great place to stay, excellent restaurants to choose from and, of course, the endless shopping experience, it proved to be the perfect mid-winter getaway. World-class museums, unique galleries, stunning architecture, those enticing restaurants, and welcoming accommodations can indeed keep you busy for days. Enjoy everything from boating to skiing and biking to snowshoeing.

There is an abundance of professional theatre, music, dance, sports, and a backyard full of recreational splendors. As the cross-



The Cresthill Suites in Albany has plenty of space.

roads of the northeast, Albany is easily accessible by car, train, and plane and is located less than three hours from New York and Boston. I have also heard very good things about the Albany Aqua Ducks & Trolleys (www.albanyaquaducks.com), an amphibious tour and trolley tour company.

The Crossgates Mall is home to 250 stores, restaurants and kiosks, including big box tenants Macy's, Sears, Dick's Sporting Goods and JC Penney (now called JCP).

The vast majority of entrances are ADA accessible with ample parking distributed throughout the site. You can rent a wheelchair at the information desk near the Macy's entrance. We spent nearly seven straight hours there on a first day and went back for another three the following afternoon.

ACCOMMODATIONS: When in Albany we enjoy staying at the Cresthill Suites (www.cresthillsuites.com), an extended stay hotel located at 1415 Washington Avenue. It turned out to be most convenient for us. There were large Hannaford's and Price Chopper grocery stores nearby, as well as plenty of restaurants, the Crossgates Mall, the Colonie Center and two movie theatre complexes. Cresthill is in fact part of a small chain, with other locales in Syracuse, NY and Wichita, Kansas.

I would strongly recommend this place for families. Our spacious two bedroom suite had all of the comforts of home, including a fully equipped kitchen with a fridge and appliances and free wireless internet. We had a comfortable living room, with a couch, chair, table and chairs, three flat screen TVs and plenty of cupboard space. Whether you're staying for a night or a month in any one of these suites, the hotel offers an array of services to accommodate your travel needs. In the morning, you can enjoy a complimentary breakfast, and in the evening, a light fare reception and social hour is available every Monday through Thursday. There is daily housekeeping, same-day valet service, a grocery shopping service, free guest laundry, a fully equipped fitness center and a seasonal courtyard with a pool, patio and grills. General Manager Lisa Druckreier notes that the 10-year-old property has a regular clientele who stay there for long periods of time, be it people working on big projects in town and in construction, those relocating, fire victims and of course vacationers who want to enjoy all of the comforts of home. The hotel has a number of handicapped

accessible rooms and handicapped parking spots at the front door. There is elevator access to each floor and level crossings in the hallways.

I found the staff at the front desk exceptionally helpful. While the room was very comfy, I also enjoyed spending time in the large lobby area and sinking into the big sofa in front of a TV. A self service coffee, tea and hot chocolate is available 24 hours a day. For more information call 1.888.723.1655 or email info@cresthillsuites.com. You can also register online.

WHERE TO DINE: We had a marvelous meal at Simpson's Grille, located at the Desmond Hotel & Conference Center (www.desmondhotelsalbany.com), a



The Albany skyline.

magnificent facility at 660 Albany Shaker Road. The Desmond is also home to the AAA four diamond-rated Scrimshaw Restaurant and The Tavern, an English style pub. There is free parking.

I started off with a warm bowl of New England clam chowder. For the main course, we selected three different items: the seafood penne alfredo, a combination of Alaskan crabmeat, jumbo gulf shrimp and Georges Bank sea scallops tossed in a garlic cream sauce; pesto herb sea scallops, coated with basil pesto and fresh herbs, broiled and finished with tomato vinaigrette; and a char grilled ribeye, 14 ounces, well marbled and full of flavor. All main courses come with a signature house or Caesar salad, choice of potato or rice pilaf and the chef's fresh vegetable of the day.

The menu also includes chicken, different fish entrees, prime rib of beef, filet mignon and veal piccata. The hotel entrance is perfectly wheelchair accessible and so

is the entire restaurant, located right by the front desk. This is a pretty venue, featuring booths and tables, and popular with tourists and locals.

Montreal now has its own P.F. Chang's China Bistro. Yet a few months ago, while anticipating the local opening, we dined at the P.F. Chang's Colonie Center location in Albany. Each dish on the P.F. Chang's (www.pfchangs.com) menu is prepared to order using the freshest and highest quality ingredients. The Albany location has been in operation for five years and the menu is tantalizing, featuring a much appreciated calorie count next to each item. You really must start off with the P.F. Chang's signature chicken lettuce wraps: wok seared minced chicken, mushrooms, green onions and water chestnuts served over crispy rice sticks with cool, crisp lettuce cups.

Select your sharing dishes wisely. My recommendation is the Mongolian beef (tender flank steak wok-cooked then quickly tossed with scallions and garlic), crispy honey shrimp (lightly battered and tossed in a sweet and tangy honey sauce with green onions), double pan-fried noodles (crisp egg noodles stir-fried with mushrooms, bok choy, carrots, celery and onions and comes with a choice of beef, pork, chicken, shrimp or vegetable) and a bowl of steamed rice.

You can check the full menu out online, including a full selection of gluten free items, lunch specials and kids choices. There is also a delicious array of signature desserts. The sidewalk leading to the restaurant, the entrance and

the entire restaurant is handicapped accessible.

AT THE MOVIES: The Albany area has some wonderful movie theatre complexes, each operated by the Regal Entertainment Group (www.regmovies.com). We have a particular fondness towards the Regal Colonie Center Stadium 13. This four-year-old movie complex encompasses around 64,000 square feet, with more than 2,800 seats in a total of 13 auditoriums. It is right next to P.F. Chang's, the Cheesecake Factory and a huge Barnes & Noble, great to know when you are planning an outing. The seats at this theatre are very comfortable as they swivel. We actually stopped by the evening before our show to pick up tickets in advance. You can also purchase them online at fandango.com.

Once in the theatre we were entertained by a feature called First Look, which included previews of upcoming film and DVD releases and a series of very amusing commercials. Hearing impaired devices are available upon request and the complex is

*The Grand Hotel and Suites' attractive pool.*

very accessible with ramps in each theatre and handicapped seating.

EXTENDED STAY TORONTO

My family and I recently returned from a nice extended stay in Toronto (www.seetorontonow.com). I have been heading down the 401 for decades, usually for a few days at a time. When work and personal commitments required an eight day stay in the

*The Desmond has wonderful dining options.*

downtown area I needed a place which could serve as a home away from home. The Grand Hotel and Suites (www.grand-hoteltoronto.com), located at the corner of Jarvis and Dundas, was the logical choice.

This is a great area to select as a base for it is in such a dynamic location. First and foremost, the amazing Eaton Centre (www.torontoeatoncentre.com) is just a few blocks away. Besides its endless array of stores and kiosks, there is an Indigo bookstore, a number of restaurants and the busy urban eatery food court, which can serve your dinner needs at good prices on a daily basis. Dundas Square, across the street, is Toronto's answer to Times Square and always full of action. The Theatre District is nearby. Thanks to Mirvish Productions (www.mirvish.com), Toronto is Canada's

answer to Broadway. The Andrew Lloyd Weber version of The Wizard of Oz (www.wizardofozthemusical.com) has been bringing in the crowds at the Ed Mirvish Theatre since December 2012, with lead performer Daniele Wade showing everyone who watched her win the role on a CBC TV reality show in the fall that she is the real thing. Its run will stretch into June and then tour the USA. The Tony Award winning musical The Book of Mormon comes to the Prince of Wales Theatre

April 30 to June 9 while Anything Goes hits the same venue July 16 to August 18.

Patrons requiring wheelchair or other special-needs seating at any of the Mirvish venues are asked to call TicketKing at either 416.872.1212 or 1.800.461.3333 for assistance in finding the best available seating alternatives.

Before leaving for Toronto, check out <http://torontomobility.com>, a website designed with the disabled in mind. You will find a list of stores, malls, buildings, attractions, etc. and just how disabled accessible they actually are. Specifics included will be location, what kind of store, whether they have automatic doors, ramps, disabled washrooms, etc. What you will also get are problems you may encounter as well. There is a 'thumbs up' and a 'thumbs down' section here.

ACCOMODATIONS:

The Grand Hotel and Suites, is located at 225 Jarvis Street, near Dundas. This beautiful locale is only 13 years old and still looks spanking new. It features 177 extraordinary guest suites. For families, the 550 square foot junior two bedroom suite feature a spacious living room/work area separated from the two bedroom areas by sets of double French glass doors with vertical blinds. The bedrooms areas contain king and queen size beds, LCD TVs and dual-line telephones with dataport. A separate living area contains a double sofa bed, TV, DVD Player, CD Player and a work desk with a dual-line telephone. There is a fully equipped kitchenette with a microwave, fridge, coffeemaker and cutlery. You can slip into a plush bathrobe, use the iron and ironing board and enjoy the convenience of the laptop size in-room safe.

There is complimentary wireless internet access in each room. Indeed this place has all of the comforts of home and more, which is why many guests capitalize on the options of extended stay packages for 21 consecutive days or more. The kitchenette is a definite bonus and something kosher guests in particular will find useful as they can prepare some of their own meals. A very large Metro supermarket is just a block and a half away. The suite has ample cupboard space to pack away the groceries.

All guests get to enjoy a splendid breakfast buffet, free of charge, with an extensive array of items to choose from. There is also a fitness centre, the two-storey neo-classical indoor pool (surrounded by exquisite hand painted murals) and two whirlpools on the rooftop garden, which provides a panoramic view of Toronto. The latter is a real plus and an area guests take advantage of year-round, even with below zero temperatures. When darkness falls, movies and television shows are piped on to a large white screen.

There is 24-hour room service, twice-daily maid service, valet and underground parking, a friendly concierge, a restaurant, 10,000 square feet of meeting space and a fully equipped business centre. Shuttle services are available to anywhere in the financial core. Make sure to bring your Aeroplan card in order to earn 500 miles per night. Having the two distinct bedrooms and the middle area was a bonus I would recommend for a family spending multiple days together in a hotel room, providing just the necessary privacy.

The hotel attracts a lot of Montrealers and for that reason you will feel right at home watching the CTV Montreal station, as well as Radio Canada. Hotel general manager Heidi Wengle confirms that this was done as a result of feedback from guests.

Furthermore, Wengle told us that there are ongoing renovations to guest rooms. This includes new linens and mattresses. Over the last couple of years all of the televisions have been replaced with LCD flat screens while hardwood flooring has also been installed. The common hallways on each floor are having the carpets replaced and new paint colours. Eventually the light fixtures and artwork will be changed as well. In the meeting room foyer the carpets were replaced and new chairs are on order for this section. There are plans to modify the main lobby and the Citrus restaurant in the near future.

The hotel is fully wheelchair accessible, either via a ramp at the front entrance or via

the indoor garage. Once inside, the elevators are of good size.

DINNER: Well, given the fact the first P.F. Chang's in Canada opened here last summer, where else would you expect me to dine? Located at the newly redeveloped and trendy Shops at Don Mills, the place was packed during our mid-week visit. While the menu is the same at all P.F. Chang's locations, our server delighted us by creating her own kind of sauce before our very eyes by mixing up the ones already placed at our tables. It was a nice twist. There is handicapped and valet parking. The entrance is wheelchair accessible, as are all of the tables.

ONTARIO SCIENCE CENTRE: I made my first visit to the iconic and massive On-

*The Ontario Science Centre.*

tario Science Centre (www.ontarioscience-centre.ca), home to interactive experiences with science and technology. This place not only develops and sources the world's best exhibitions – supplemented with relevant programming to provide engaging experiences – but it aims to make a fundamental difference in the lives of visitors by providing them the skills and attributes to create a better future for the planet.

This is a barrier-free facility, offering extra-wide parking, free wheelchairs and strollers, wheelchair seating in the marvelous Shoppers Drug Mart® OMNIMAX® Theatre (where we saw the amazing film Born to Be Wild), barrier-free elevators, a washroom for special needs persons and safe areas of refuge in case of emergency. Their Access Guide for Visually Impaired Persons lists exhibits that can be experienced through touch, taste, hearing and smell. Organizations serving disabled people are admitted for free to the Ontario Science Centre, as part of a registered program of therapy.

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Alexandre Bilodeau: The golden heart of an Olympian

By Wendy Singer

On February 14, 2010 in Vancouver B.C., freestyle skier Alexandre Bilodeau became the first Canadian Olympian to win gold on Canadian soil. The country watched as he celebrated his victory with his brother Frédéric, who was just as much a winner in Alexandre's eyes. Frédéric, who has cerebral palsy, is Alexandre's hero.

In a recent visit to the Mackay Centre School in N.D.G., which caters to students who are physically disabled and hearing impaired, Alexandre told students that, like many Canadian boys, his first sport was hockey. But his mother switched him to skiing because it was a sport the whole family, including Frédéric, could enjoy together.

Mackay students prepared questions for the Olympian including: 'Did you have a hard time in school?' to which Alexandre responded: "Yes, I was never the best at school or in ski class, but I've always been the hardest working. That's how you get the best results."

Frédéric continuously reminds Alexandre of the importance of having dreams and believing that you can achieve them. "Fred doesn't complain," he told Inspirations in an interview after the Mackay School visit. "It is frustrating for him because his symptoms have pro-



Alexandre with students at McKay Centre School.

gressed and he can't ski anymore. But he has found other dreams. When I have a dream I work 110 percent for it out of respect for my brother."

The media went wild over the Bilodeau Olympic win, and Alexandre decided to bank on this momentum. He felt the need to give back to Canada - the country that had given him so much. He and fellow skier Jennifer Heil challenged Canadians to "give back in your own way," be it through monetary donations or acts of kindness.

"My way was to give to the person I've received so much from, which is Frédéric," explains Alexandre.

On February 18, 2010, Alexandre do-

nated \$25,000 to The Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centres (CAPHC) - a non-profit organization that represents all Canadian children's hospitals and many organizations that provide services to children and youth. His intention was to help children learn how to live with their cerebral palsy at a young age.

"The Bilodeau family has enabled the ongoing development of an unprecedented national paediatric rehabilitation database focusing on children and youth with cerebral palsy and autism," explains Elaine Orrbine, president and CEO; CAPHC.

The database has the potential to identify promising practices that will allow safe, effective, efficient care and ultimately improved outcomes. "Prior to this, reliable data were tough to come by because it wasn't structured to be collected uniquely for this population," adds Ms. Orrbine, grateful for the support of the Bilodeau family.

With the help of family, friends and sponsors, the Bilodeaus have more than doubled their original contribution to

CAPHC. Frédéric fundraises with Alexandre and their father Serge Bilodeau, and is making a difference. "My brother is so happy when he helps and that's priceless for me and my family," shares Bilodeau.

Alexandre sends a personal 'thank you' to The Mackay Centre School for the photo album they sent him after his visit. "I really appreciate having this souvenir and seeing the kids smile in the pictures," he shares.



Alexandre Bilodeau and brother Frédéric.

The Canadian Association of Paediatric Health Centres (CAPHC) / Association Canadienne Des Centres De Santé Pédiatriques (ACCSP)



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF PAEDIATRIC HEALTH CENTRES
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES CENTRES DE SANTÉ PÉDIATRIQUES

By Elaine Orrbine

CAPHC supports professionals from more than 70 organizations providing healthcare services to Canada's children and youth. CAPHC's members include acute care hospitals, community & regional hospitals, rehabilitation centres and home care provider agencies across Canada. All children's hospitals in Canada are members of CAPHC, providing strong linkages to clinical care, education and research. Each year, approximately 8.75 million children and youth rely on the services of CAPHC's member organizations.

CAPHC supports national education, research and quality improvement initiatives as well as the development of national databases aimed at improving healthcare delivery for Canada's children and youth.

Access to accurate and reliable data is critical to evaluating success and determining how to improve health outcomes. The generous support of the Bilodeau family has enabled the ongoing development of an unprecedented national paediatric rehabilitation database.

This database will be key to understanding how best to use limited resources to purposefully align healthcare services to optimize the child's ability and sup-

port a fulfilling and meaningful life for children with disabilities. It will also enable provincial comparisons and identification of best practices across Canada for outpatient paediatric rehabilitation services.

CAPHC's work in the area of childhood disabilities and rehabilitation has also resulted in the creation of a national rehabilitation network that has brought together the majority of children's rehabilitation centres in Canada.

"CAPHC is most grateful to the Bilodeau family for their commitment and support!"



David Eng raises funds for the Mackay Centre School

By Wendy Singer

The theme song of the Olympic and Paralympic games was playing as Mackay Centre School students entered their gym to meet David Eng, co-captain of the Canadian Men's Wheelchair basketball team (Team Canada).

Eng has participated in four Paralympic games with Team Canada, one of the world's top wheelchair basketball teams having won three gold medals in their past four Paralympic games (2000, 2004, 2012) and one silver in 2008.

"Winning gold is something really special," said Eng while holding his gold medal. "The first time I won gold was in Athens, and it was for me. Winning gold again in London was for my teammates, the fans, and all Canadians."

Eng has one leg that is disproportionate to the other, which caused him severe back problems when he was young. He



David Eng presents cheque. With vice-principal Joe Ann Désir and Mackay students.

holds a B.A. in Kinesiology from the University of Texas in Arlington, and a Masters in Physiology.

Last year, with the help of friend Zoe Hurtado and trainer Alex Babin, Eng hosted a simulation of a Paralympic

wheelchair basketball game at Cégep Marie-Victorin. His mission was three-fold: to play a game with his teammates in Montreal (he is the only member of the team that trains here); to promote wheelchair basketball; to raise money for a charity. His cause of choice was

The Mackay Centre School.

The simulation included cheering crowds, bleachers, music, and a half-time show with performances by the Unleashed Dance Crew and Luca Lazylegz Patuelli.

"We organized the Paralympic simulation for fun, but due to amazing support, we were able to raised \$1,007 for Mackay," said Eng as he presented a cheque to the school. He also gave the school a Canadian flag signed by his entire team.

This super athlete left his audience with a few words of encouragement: "You have to keep dreaming every single day so you can achieve what you want."

Eng could not leave without shooting a few hoops with three Mackay students. It was a thrill to see him play basketball!

Sponsored by GamePoints with Matthew Ross, Sundays and Tuesdays on TSN 690, @tsnmatthew on Twitter.

Learning How to Fly: A group of special needs children learn cheerleading

By Jeff Bergman

Somersaults, cartwheels, and tumbling are not an easy feat for the average person to undertake let alone a child with a special need.

Several years ago, parent Helen Dicso took her son Michael, who has special needs, to the Flyers Cheerleading All Starz Gym to watch her daughter compete. After the competition, the gym owner asked Dicso's advice about starting a cheerleading class for children with special needs. The owner had observed Michael watching his sister's

events and classes with great intent, and thought that a program for children with special needs - a dream she had for many years - would be an excellent idea.

This is how it started, and today, the program has grown to include seven children between the ages of 11 to 15 with various forms of special needs. Head coach Stephany De Rosa and her team have developed a modified version of cheerleading where they take into consideration all the children's needs; and in doing so, enrich their lives in and outside of the gym in countless ways.

Michael, age 12, has mental intellectual delay, apraxia, and sensory processing disorder. At the beginning, Michael needed to wear ear plugs to muffle the music at cheerleading practices whereas now, through adaptation and a lot of hard work with the coaching staff, he no longer needs them.

Michael says that going down into bridge pose is his favourite cheerleading move. When his mother asks him how he feels about cheerleading Michael responds, "I love it!" His mother adds: "It's a response you don't normally expect a young boy to have, but he does. It's because it allows him to dance, be the centre of attention, make friends, and have a sense of pride and accomplishment. This provides an interesting and challenging outlet for him at a place he can call home outside of school."

For fun, the class competes at the Fédération de cheerleading Du Québec's provincials competition. Last year, Dicso received comments from observers who were surprised that this team was comprised of children with

special needs. While having fun, they are also educating the public about the challenges children face but are able to overcome, and fly in life, with groups like this.

For information visit www.flyerscheerleading.net or call 514-332-3777.



The Flyers Cheerleading team perform at the Fédération de cheerleading du Québec provincials.

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