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

Spring / Summer 2015

INSPIRATIONS

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Vol. 7 No. 2

A new ambassador for Special Olympics Québec

Two-time Olympic free-style skiing champion Alexandre Bilodeau, the new Ambassador to Special Olympics Québec, with Valérie Gagnon Paradis and Andrew Perez, both swimmers from Laval who will be participating in the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles from July 25 to August 2, 2015. (Photo credit, Mélissa Vincelli)

Read the full article on Page 34

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

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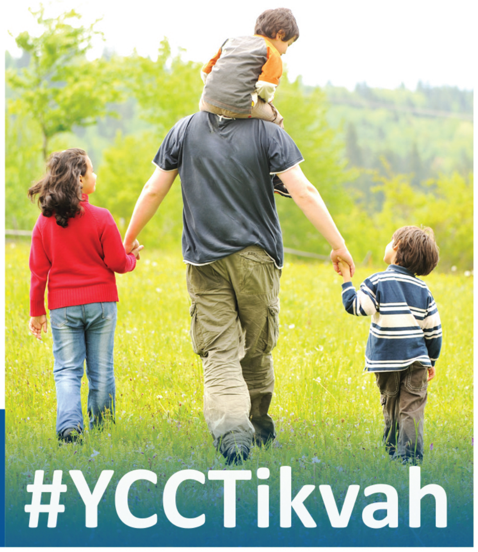

Thursday, August 13 - Sunday, August 16
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Special Needs Programming ext. 235
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Marlene & Joel King Special Needs Department

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- Yedidut 13 - 17 yrs
- Mischakim 30 - 45 yrs
- Chaverim 20 - 35 yrs
- Meet Me at the Y 35 yrs+
- Sunday Leisure Time 50 yrs+
- Kouleinu Yachad: We all belong
- Club Rendez-Vouz Drop-in Centre
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- Horizons / Manhigim YCC Day Camps

VISUAL ART FOR ADULTS 20 yrs+

- Mixed Media
- Art Appreciation
- Open Studio

The YCC Special Needs Family Camp gears up for its second session

By Wendy Singer

The Y Country Camp (YCC) Special Needs Family Camp is looking forward to hosting its second summer session from August 13 to 16, 2015. The only program of its kind in Canada, this unique camp experience features one-on-one Buddies for special needs children, programming for siblings, and respite programming for parents.

Camper and Buddy at the YCC Special Needs Camp. (Photo courtesy of The Ben Weider YM-YWHA)

The goal of the YCC Special Needs Family Camp is to offer children with a variety of physical and intellectual/cognitive disabilities the opportunity to experience camp, which they otherwise may not have been able to do, and to benefit from the YCC's facilities.

Families are welcome to use all facilities from the indoor pool to the climbing wall, to lake and boating activities, campfire sing-alongs, and more. Their aim is sound - to give families and campers the full camp experience and a wonderful vacation break together.

"For many of our campers, opportunities to participate in such an array of activities and programs where they have the support of trained Buddies and Specialists do not come along often," says Matthew Selvin, Special Needs Coordinator of the YCC Special Needs Camp. "Our camp gives campers the amazing chance to make friends with others, siblings the chance to bond with other siblings of special needs children, and parents the chance to network with other families who share similar experiences."

The 2015 camp session promises to be even better than last year. YCC can now accommodate more families, the facilities have been physically improved to accommodate all abilities, new and exciting programs will be offered, and several volunteers and professionals from the special needs field will share their expertise this year.

"In over 40 years as an educator, I can honestly say that my time at the YCC Special Needs Family Camp has probably been the most meaningful experience of my professional life," shares Sid Milech, Director Emeritus of the Harry Bronfman Y Country Camp.

The YCC Special Needs Camp is keeping the camp experience alive year-round, hosting events to keep their camper families connected. Registration is open now, earlier than usual so that before camp starts, families have the chance to socialize and meet the staff at organized events. For information contact (514) 737-6551, ext 267.

INSPIRATIONS

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The Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2015:

Jesse Heffring, Summit School: Putting drops in the bucket of change

By Cindy Davis

Jesse Heffring had never worked with students with special needs before he began volunteering at Summit School in 2003. After taking a tour of the school, the filmmaker, who hails from Calgary, was asked to help out with the production of a documentary. The experience was so positive for Heffring and the students, that he joined the staff as Media Project Coordinator in 2005.

Jesse Heffring filming a spoof commercial with students Piraveen and George.

Throughout his years at Summit School, Heffring and his students have produced fiction, animation, and documentary films as well as highly acclaimed original plays in which the students are involved in every level of production. From researching, storyboarding and writing, he truly believes in the importance of helping the students find their own voice through the arts.

Jesse Heffring with Summit School T.E.C.C. students Marianne, Piraveen, Jared, George, Michael, and Marjorie.

"Creative work gives you a type of confidence when you are truly involved in it. It's not dictated to you but you are free to share your ideas," says Heffring. Unlike in other subjects where students are taught concrete facts, he believes a creative concept brought to life though performance teaches students that their own ideas are valuable. "You have a creative idea – it could be an idea you have before you go to bed, then your classmates accept it, it's then incorporated into a project and eventually shown to an audience – it comes full circle. It may not be conscious, but that direct connection is a really powerful way of pushing forward the confidence of these individuals."

Because the plays are written by the students themselves, they often deal with hard-hitting topics that allow them to communicate their perspective of the world. With titles like Rachel at Risk and You'll Never Walk Alone, Heffring feels the plays act as a bridge in society to which the students might not otherwise have access. "The plays give our students a chance to break down barriers," Heffring says with a smile. "We're trying to put drops in the bucket of change."

"Jesse Heffring is a special and remarkable individual who has won the hearts of the students and staff of Summit School," says Herman Erdogmus, Director of Summit School. "As a writer, director, media instructor, and volunteer program instructor, Jesse challenges and brings forth the artistic talents of the students. His love of his work is obvious, and reflected in his students."

Heffring's high-calibre productions are sold out year after year, and are put together by an army of dedicated staff members, parents, and professional musicians who donate their time. He believes that it's the fusion of the students' unfiltered passion combined with the technique of the highly-skilled professionals that makes his productions unique. Though he is honoured to be receiving the Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration Award, Heffring says he is more excited that the recognition will highlight the efforts of the students, parents and the dedicated team of professionals at Summit School.

Jesse Heffring

Heffring was nominated as Caregiver of Inspiration by Inspirations' own managing editor Wendy Singer, who met him several years ago when he brought students to help with the packaging and distribution of Inspirations newspapers through Summit School's T.E.C.C. program. Singer was struck by Heffring's kindness and concern for his students and she has delighted in watching his theatrical success with his students ever since. "Each show that Jesse produces has an eternal shelf-life for both the students and audience. He gives his students the opportunity to shine, tell their stories, and has a knack for bringing out the unique abilities of each student involved," says Singer. "Jesse has enormous talent and insight, which provide him with the ability to create such powerful and important pieces of theatre."

So what's next for Heffring and his students? Aside from putting the final touches on a documentary that he hopes to screen at film festivals in the fall, he and his team are working on an original musical scheduled for May 2016. "Picture Ferris Bueller's Day Off meets The Breakfast Club," he chuckles. With Heffing's track record, it's sure to be a new classic all its own.

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

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

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Frank Verpaelst: On dwarfism and focusing on THIS and THAT ability

By Frank Verpaelst

I very much dislike words like disabled and handicapped. For several years now I've maintained that disability is in the eye, and mind, of the beholder. The reality is every single human being on the planet has a wide range of abilities and limitations which are constantly in a state of flux. A well-balanced and positive individual wakes up every day and focuses on what they CAN do, instead of getting hung up on their limitations.

And while I totally support the notion of believing in oneself and having dreams, I also understand that delusion is not a good thing. Having been born with dwarfism, I totally accept that in all likelihood, I will never be a professional athlete. But should I let that stop me from participating in the sports that I love, out of self-doubt and fear? Never!

At a certain point in my life, I stopped heaping blame on my shoulders because I could no longer walk up a flight of stairs. Was I really disabled, or was the entire construction business 'design challenged'? With all those civil engineers, architects, and inventors in the world, and billions of dollars spent on new homes and condos throughout the world, are you telling me that absolutely no one can invent an inexpensive and safe way to get grandpa up the stairs? In my opinion, we are not disabled; it's the rest of society that is lacking the moral fiber to make our world fully accessible.

When you focus on your abilities, it opens up a world of possibilities. For instance, I never played lacrosse, but I loved the sport. Instead of whining about it, I decided to get involved. I coached a peewee team, and those were truly the most exciting days of my life. I also loved playing table tennis, but could never win a game against my taller friends. So, I joined a local club and signed up for a summertime training camp. Although I never won a match in any of the tournaments, when I got back to college that autumn, my friends sure were surprised when those ping-pong balls started whipping past them.

Labels can be useful, especially in regards to our rights and programs available to persons with disabilities. However, we must always be aware of the double-edged swords that labels represent. We might have a certain disability, but we should never let that disability define who we are, or limit who we can become. Rather than focusing on disability, wouldn't it be better if we all focused on THIS ability, and THAT ability, (and the other, and so on, and so on).

Frank Verpaelst playing the hammer dulcimer. (Photo credit, Levi Verpaelst)

I thank you all for your attention, and now return you to regularly scheduled programming.

Frank Verpaelst is a blogger, musician, and public speaker, trying to make this world a better place. To learn more about Frank, visit https://www.patreon.com/gutsydwarf.

Resource Page

By Wendy Singer

The Regroupement québécois des maladies orphelines (RQMO)/Quebec Coalition of Orphan Diseases is a coalition of rare disease patient organizations and of individuals who have rare diseases of any nature that do not have organizations to turn to. A disease is considered to be rare when it affects fewer than one in 2,000 individuals in the general population (for example, Fragile X syndrome, neuromuscular disorders, chromosomal syndromes, immunodeficiency disorders, etc.).

The RQMO's mission is: to provide information and support to individuals living with a rare disease, their families and health professionals; to share information on issues surrounding rare diseases; to raise awareness about rare diseases in the general public and medical community; and to bring together patients and researchers to help advance knowledge on specific rare diseases.

The RQMO has the only Rare Disease Information and Resource Center in Quebec where health professionals give official, trustworthy and up-to-date information on any rare disease including information on the disease, patient organizations, specialized clinics or experts, orphan drugs or other treatments, research projects, clinical trials, etc. They can also find community and government organizations to help with other matters (financial, social services, etc.). Other services include connecting people with the same disease and giving basic genetic counselling in the case of genetic diseases.

Do you or someone you know have a rare or undiagnosed disease and might benefit from these services? Are you a health professional looking for information or resources for a patient affected by a rare disease? For information, contact info@rqmo.org, www.rqmo.org, (514) 451-7482, (819) 543-0550 (Sherbrooke) or toll-free at 1-855-543-0550. Service is bilingual.

Ometz Parlour Groups have been organized for parents for 18 years, with small groups meeting monthly with an Ometz professional facilitator to discuss the issues which impact parenting today. Four years ago, Ometz created their first parlour group for parents of children with a range of special needs. Groups meet monthly and are facilitated by an Ometz professional whose expertise lies in mental health, social work or psychology, depending on the needs of the group.

"The parlour group is an opportunity to provide information, but the focus is on building strong networks of support for parents," shares Barbara Victor, Director of Clinical Services at Agence Ometz. "In between monthly meetings, parents are encouraged to touch base and share experiences. The feedback we get is unanimous in that these are wonderful opportunities to find a place where you can get support and new information, in a safe and secure environment while connecting to other parents with similar issues."

"It is possible to run parlour groups in different languages including French, Hebrew and Russian," adds Carol Liverman, Clinical Supervisor at Agence Ometz.

"Parenting is a really tough job. We know that one of the assets that children have is having effective parents. We also know from research that parents learn from each other," says Victor. "The biggest validation of a group like this is that you want to be surrounded by other people who are facing similar challenges and sharing successes."

If you would like to learn more about the Ometz Parlour Group Program, or speak to a parent member of a group, contact Carol Liverman at (514) 342-0000, local 3846. For information, visit http://www.ometz.ca.

Disability Financial Assistance Corporation are experts who know about all of the provincial and federal government programs that offer financial assistance and other benefits to individuals with disabilities and their families. These include tax credits for children and adults, monthly disability supplements for children, additional programs for computer equipment and educational software for people with learning disabilities, renovation grants for those with physical limitations, and much more. Disability Financial Assistance Corporation (DFAC) helps access government benefits and funding for individuals and families that live with disabilities.

There are so many different factors to consider when applying for benefits such as age, income and disability. DFAC, with its team of experienced tax and disabilities professionals, develops a plan that is tailored specifically to you or your family's needs, cutting right through the maze of red tape and bureaucracy. With sensitivity and confidentiality, DFAC ensures that you receive the maximum amount of benefits that you are entitled to.

For information, contact 1-855-382-3322 (DFAC), local 703 or 701.

The LDAQ has changed its name to the **Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities (MCLD)**. Over 40 years ago, a small group of parents got together to seek help and services for their children who were doing poorly in school. Very little was known then about these "disconcerting" children who, despite their intellectual skill, had difficulty learning to read, write, calculate, socialize, communicate, etc.

This group grew to become the Learning Disabilities Association of Quebec-Montreal Chapter 1. In 1995 after recognizing a need, they expanded to encompass AD/HD. In April of 2014, LDAQ-Montreal Chapter 1 went through a major transition. They separated from their head office L'Association québécoise des troubles d'apprentissage and became the Montréal Centre for Learning Disabilities/Centre Montréalais pour les troubles d'apprentissage.

For information about MCLD's services, including programming for adults and children with ADHD, LD or Mild Autism Spectrum Disorder, Nurtured Heart® Parent Workshops, Theraplay®, Social and Thinking, and Life Skills groups, Adult Employment, Aqua K.I.D.S. and the Ambassadors, visit www.ldmontreal.ca.

The Enabling Accessibility Fund is a federal Grants and Contributions program that supports capital costs of construction and renovations related to improving physical accessibility and safety for people with disabilities in Canadian communities and workplaces.

From installing automated door openers, constructing a universally designed office or retrofitting a washroom with an accessible toilet, grab bars and taps, the Enabling Accessibility Fund works to enable Canadians with disabilities to participate in their community and the economy.

Since its creation in 2007, the program has funded over 1,400 projects across the country and has improved accessibility for thousands of Canadians. The program includes two streams: workplace accessibility, and community accessibility.

For more information and grant application deadlines visit http://www.esdc.gc.ca/eng/disability/eaf/index.shtml.

The Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities (OF) program helps people with disabilities prepare for, obtain and maintain employment or self-employment through funding for organizations. Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) accepts OF applications for local and regional projects on an ongoing basis.

Eligible applicants include: Not-for-profit organizations; municipal governments; aboriginal organizations (including band councils, tribal councils and self-government entities); for-profit organizations; and, provincial and territorial governments, institutions, agencies and Crown Corporations.

Participants are recruited by the contribution recipients. To participate in the OF, individuals must: self-identify as having a permanent physical or mental disability that restricts his or her ability to perform daily activities; be legally entitled to work according to the relevant provincial and federal legislation and regulations; be a Canadian citizen, permanent resident, or person who has been granted refugee status in Canada; not be eligible for assistance under Employment Insurance (EI) employment benefits or any similar programs that are the subject of agreements with provinces, territories, or organizations entered into pursuant to Section 63 of the EI Act (unless approved by a departmental official); and, require assistance to prepare for, obtain and keep employment or self-employment.

For more details about the OF, visit http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/of/index.shtml.

Improving school climate through disability awareness programs

By Karen Morrison

The Rick Hansen School Program is a comprehensive set of resources for administrators, teachers and students designed to increase disability awareness, accessibility and inclusion, and empower young people to make a difference in their school, community and the world.

Teachers and administrators say that the program decreases bullying, improves student attitudes and perceptions of people with disabilities, and results in student initiatives to improve classrooms, schools and communities.

Recent research has demonstrated the importance of [a] positive school climate for improving behavioural, academic and mental health outcomes for students[1]. Positive school climate increases student learning and achievement, reduces high school dropout rates and prevents bullying[2]. It is also effective in risk prevention, learning[3] and motivation to learn[4] . Clearly, school climate matters.

So what is this magical 'thing' we call positive school climate? A positive school climate exists when all members of the school community feel safe, included, and accepted, and actively promote positive behaviours and interactions[5]. It is the recognition that education goes beyond the function of curriculum to include social, moral, ethical and prosocial behaviour.

Sometimes, however, the challenge is not defining a positive school climate or agreeing it is important, but finding the time and resources to make it a priority.

The process for developing a positive school climate is ongoing. It involves making positive relationships a priority, providing students with opportunities to develop and practice empathy, compassion and conflict resolution skills, and to take a leadership role[6] .

Not-for-profit educational resources, such as the Rick Hansen School Program, provide educators with a range of practical teaching tools that support the development of a positive school climate.

Two key aspects of the Rick Hansen School Program support the development of a positive school climate:

- Disability awareness programs promote key characteristics of a positive school climate, such as equity, fairness, caring and sensitivity. They dispel myths and improve knowledge, reduce bullying[7] and create more favorable attitudes towards people with disabilities[8]. By supporting acceptance of diversity, respect and understanding of differences, disability awareness programs encourage positive interactions among all students.
- Encouraging students to create positive change. Students learn to set goals, support others, and take leadership. Students develop and apply knowledge, skills and attitudes to become informed, responsible citizens and improve schools and communities through social action projects.

Current research shows that a positive climate that emphasizes high expectations for caring relationships and respectful interactions plays a key role in effective schools and academic success. Investing time and effort in creating such climates leads to positive outcomes for all students and school communities. Programs such as the Rick Hansen School Program promote understanding of disabilities, differences and inclusion, and encourage students to become responsible citizens, creating positive outcomes for all.


Rick Hansen showing school kids an accessible playground. (Photo courtesy of The Rick Hansen Foundation)

The Rick Hansen School Program is a comprehensive set of free resources for K-12 educators to increase disability awareness, accessibility and inclusion, and empower young people to make a difference. Ninety-nine percent of teachers and administrators who responded to a recent survey reported that the program has made a positive difference in their school. Program materials align with provincial curriculum expectations. Materials are available online at www.rickhansen.com/schools.

Karen Morrison is the Curriculum Developer for the Rick Hansen School Program, Rick Hansen Foundation.

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[1] Thapa et al., 2012, Cohen & Geier, 2010, Gregory et. al., 2010, Lee et al., 2011
[2] National School Climate Center http://www.schoolclimate.org/
[3] Najaka, et.,al., 2002
[4] Eccles, et al., 1993, Goodenow and Crady 1997
[5] Ontario Ministry of Education, Policy/ Program Memorandum No. 145, "Progressive Discipline and Promoting Positive Student Behaviour" (December 5, 2012)
[6] Weissbourd, Bouffard and Jones, 2013
[7] Milson, 2006
[8] Ison, et. al. 2010; Moore & Nettelbeck, 2013; Rillotta & Nettlebeck, 2007

New Director General at Giant Steps School

By Wendy Singer

Join us in welcoming Seiun Thomas Henderson into the position of Director General of Giant Steps School. Henderson has over 25 years of experience teaching, training and administering programs directed at young, teen and adult students with disabilities, and specifically autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). He is an experienced director of community outreach programs and social innovation initiatives supporting and representing the needs of individuals with developmental differences, difficulties or disabilities.

Henderson returns to Giant Steps from CRISPESH (Centre de recherche pour l'inclusion scolaire et professionnelle des étudiants en situation de handicap) at the Cégep du Vieux Montréal and Dawson College where he was Director. Henderson previously worked at Giant Steps as the Training Coordinator and Social Skills Specialist.

Henderson's areas of professional interest and expertise include; autism and learning, social and pedagogical innovation, inclusive education, strength-based curriculum development, universal design for learning, educational technology, accessibility in education, supporting self-advocacy and self-determination, strategic planning, project management, training, research development, and community partnerships.

Edward Murphy Elementary School walks during Autism Awareness Month

By Wendy Singer

Stephanie Napolitano and Pamela D'Adamo teach Edward Murphy Elementary School's two specialized classes for students with autism. In April, they organized an autism awareness walk, which all students, teachers, and some parents participated in.

In preparation for Autism Awareness Month, Tania Piperni, Autism Spectrum Disorders Consultant at the English Montreal School Board, presented workshops about autism to each cycle of students at the school, giving them the opportunity to ask questions about autism and better understand it.

Students came prepared for the walk dressed in blue and waving signs that shared messages about autism. Congratulations Edward Murphy Elementary, and all other schools that took part in autism awareness activities during the month of April.

Pamela D'Adamo with students Ralph, Italia, and Samuel, and Stephanie Napolitano after their autism awareness walk at Edward Murphy Elementary School.

The Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration: Leslie Levinson celebrates with team

By Wendy Singer

The best way to honour a Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration is when the recipient is surrounded by her colleagues. And if this celebration coincides with Teacher Appreciation Week, even better.

The Inspirations team was delighted to attend the Mackay Centre School and Philip E. Layton School for the Blind's luncheon in honour of Teacher Appreciation Week to share words, gifts, and a delicious Italian lunch with the Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration 2014 Leslie Levinson and her colleagues.

Levinson developed and now runs the Augmentative Communication Class at The Mackay Centre School. "It is a specialized class for children with disabilities whose receptive language is better than their expressive language," says Levinson. "They can understand and process things but have no means of expressing them. We teach them communication systems."

The award ceremony came as a surprise to Levinson, which is just the way principal Patrizia Ciccarelli planned it. Her colleagues provided a resounding reception as she was called up to receive her honours. We gave her passes to Cinemas Guzzo, and the Big Blue Hug's painting Love is all you need, presented by the artist himself, Jason Goldsmith. Also in attendance were Inspirations editor Mike Cohen, and Inspirations coordinator of educational outreach Linda Mahler.

After Ciccarelli presented Levinson with a framed copy of the Teacher of Inspiration article that we ran in our Fall 2014 / Winter 2015 edition, we asked her to share a few words. She addressed her colleagues as "my best friends," and was quick to give credit to the entire MacKay team who she says have always supported her. Congratulations to Leslie Levinson and the entire staff!

Linda Mahler, Jason Goldsmith, Wendy Singer, Patrizia Ciccarelli, and Leslie Levinson at the Mackay Centre School Teacher of Appreciation award ceremony.

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If you would like to nominate a Teacher of Inspiration, email mcohen@inspirationsnews.com.

Josée Di Spaldro : une Asperger gastronome parmi nous

Josée Di Spaldro avec son chat Safran.

Par Emmanuelle Assor

Josée Di Spaldro, autiste Asperger, a un cheminement unique : diplômée en sciences infirmières de l'université de Montréal, elle a travaillé comme infirmière et termine ces jours-ci son doctorat dans ce même domaine. Diagnostiquée avec un TSA-TDAH en 2012, Josée avait toujours su qu'elle ne fonctionnait pas comme les autres. «Depuis que je suis petite, la gestion de mes émotions a été compliquée pour moi. La maladresse des relations et l'impossibilité d'enrober les choses ont souvent désarçonné mon entourage. Ainsi, mon parcours professionnel a été parsemé d'embûches, de déceptions et j'ai souvent vu mes amitiés et liens amoureux brisés.»

Dans ce contexte, recevoir un diagnostic de TSA (anciennement appelé syndrome d'Asperger) a été un soulagement. «J'ai enfin compris ma différence et surtout comment la gérer au quotidien avec l'aide de psychoéducateurs et autres intervenants. J'ai un franc-parler «autiste» mais aussi un enthousiasme pour plusieurs choses, comme pour la cuisine et pour mon chat Safran».

D'origine italienne et québécoise, Josée a grandi dans une maison où ses deux parents cuisinaient avec plaisir. La gastronomie n'a plus aucun secret pour elle qui concocte un excellent osso bucco aux parfums d'orange et de safran accompagné d'un délicieux risotto aux pleurotes marinés dans du vin blanc. Depuis quelques mois, Josée a prêté ses talents au Dépôt alimentaire de NDG où elle prépare un atelier de cuisine une fois par mois. Dans ce lieu où elle seule est Asperger, cela n'est pas toujours facile de socialiser mais la passion des bons petits plats a pris le dessus. «J'aime beaucoup partager ma passion pour la nourriture et contribuer ainsi aux cuisines collectives. A choisir entre un menu trop «santé» et de simples choses bonnes au goût, je préfère manger du yogourt grec plutôt que du poulet bouilli!» dit-elle en riant.

Quel avenir pour cette gastronome brillante aux défis particuliers? Tout d'abord, en mai, elle soutiendra sa thèse, un projet qu'elle poursuit depuis plusieurs années et qui lui tient à cœur. Parallèlement, Josée a plusieurs idées liées au domaine de la gastronomie et pense déjà à des ateliers d'échanges culinaires où chacun amènerait de bons ingrédients qui seraient utilisés pour des plats collectifs. Des cours de cuisine en petit groupe de personnes TSA pour les aider à socialiser dans un contexte agréable sont aussi à envisager. Quant aux «recettes de Josée», c'est un projet qui ne saurait tarder à voir le jour…. A suivre!

L'Association de Montréal pour la déficience intellectuelle (L'AMDI) fête ses 80 ans !

Par Nathalie Goudreau

En 1935, des parents pour qui il était essentiel d'offrir une vie « normale » à leur enfant ayant une déficience intellectuelle ont décidé de fonder l'Association de Montréal pour la déficience intellectuelle (AMDI). Nous sommes fiers de souligner cette année les 80 années d'existence de l'AMDI ! C'est grâce à tous ceux et celles qui se sont serré les coudes en 1935 que l'AMDI est la plus ancienne association dédiée à la déficience intellectuelle au Canada.

Jeudi le 4 juin dès 18 h, à la TOHU, l'AMDI présentera la deuxième édition de la soirée enCirquez-vous!, un événement-bénéfice où plus de 150 personnes du milieu des affaires sont attendues. Cette soirée, animée par le comédien Daniel Brière, lancera les festivités soulignant le 80e anniversaire de l'Association et promet d'être haute en couleur. Au programme : cocktail, réseautage, encan silencieux, remise des Prix Janine Sutto et de la bourse de la Fondation de Montréal pour la déficience intellectuelle.

Grâce à une collaboration exceptionnelle cette année, les invités auront la chance de voir le spectacle du tout dernier tournant de la formation des 29 circassiens de l'École nationale de cirque. Ces artistes investiront la TOHU avec leurs talents exceptionnels avant de rejoindre les compagnies de cirque les plus en vue de la planète. Toute une soirée en perspective et une belle occasion de sauter dans l'arène pour soutenir les familles dont un membre vit avec une déficience intellectuelle.

Nous vous invitons à participer en grand nombre à cet événement. Pour réserver vos billets (au coût de 60 $) ou pour faire un don, contactez le (514) 381-2300, poste 34 ou écrivez à communication@amdi.info. Des reçus seront remis pour fins d'impôts.

Pour tous les détails sur la soirée, visitez le http://amdi.info/wp/2013/03/15/soiree-encirquez-vous-au-profit-de-lamdi/.

Depuis 1935, l'AMDI offre des services qui répondent aux besoins des personnes ayant une déficience intellectuelle et de leur famille afin que chaque personne ayant une déficience intellectuelle puisse prendre sa place dans la société. Notre mission 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.

80e
1935-2015
amdi
Association de Montréal pour
la déficience intellectuelle

Ancestors Genes

By Abhishek Salunke

I have C.P. but I do not blames my genes.
I live with it like a beggar.
I deal with it like a millionaire.
I cried because of it, like a newborn child, but I do not blame my ancestors.
I know for a fact it is not a curse or spell put on my soul,
that can be fixed with hocus pocus.
My soul is a hole with a scratch,
like an accident in a car crash.
I live with it like a beggar,
I deal with it like a millionaire.
I cry because of it like a newborn child.

Abhishek Salunke is a student at Place Cartier, Lester B. Pearson School Board.

Le désir de poursuivre sa formation

Par Julie René de Cotret

Mon fils Louis-Mathieu est actuellement en deuxième année du cours de formation préparatoire à l'emploi, dans une école secondaire. Le programme de formation préparatoire au travail dans lequel il est inscrit s'adresse aux jeunes ayant des besoins particuliers. À 16 ans, il vit une expérience de stage de deux jours semaine en milieu de travail et fréquente son école secondaire les trois autres jours. Le but de son stage est de lui permettre de développer des compétences de travail et d'autonomie.

À l'heure actuelle, Louis-Mathieu adore son stage d'aide-boulanger dans une épicerie. Les gens qu'il côtoie l'assistent dans la réalisation de ses tâches. Il aime les jours de stage et est toujours très motivé. Il me dit se sentir à sa place et respecté. Il reçoit également le soutien du personnel de son école qui vient l'accompagner quelques heures par semaine. Si Louis-Mathieu répond aux exigences de son milieu de stage, il sera promu en troisième année du programme en septembre prochain. D'ici là, il doit continuer de bien faire ce qu'on attend de lui tout en progressant dans ses apprentissages.

J'ai demandé à mon fils ce qu'il aimerait faire une fois qu'il aura terminé son cours en formation préparatoire du travail. Il m'a dit que s'il termine l'année prochaine, il se trouverait trop jeune pour finir l'école. Pour lui, il est important de poursuivre sa scolarité tout comme son grand frère. Il veut améliorer ses apprentissages en lecture, écriture et en mathématiques. Il désire aussi parfaire ses connaissances générales. Il aimerait améliorer ses habiletés afin d'avoir un travail qui saura le valoriser. Plus tard, il se voit travailler avec le public parce qu'il aime les contacts humains. Tout comme son frère, il désire devenir autonome et obtenir un emploi qui lui permettra d'avoir une vie d'adulte.

Louis-Mathieu pendant son stage chez Metro. (Crédit photo : Jean-Sebastien Beauchenes)

Il est important que les jeunes ayant un handicap puissent avoir l'opportunité de poursuivre leurs études comme les gens de leur âge. Bien que le secteur des jeunes leur offre la possibilité de poursuivre leur scolarité jusqu'à 21 ans, certains obtiendront leur certification avant d'avoir atteint cet âge. Que ce soit à l'âge de 19, 20 ou 21 ans, plusieurs n'auront pas atteint la maturité nécessaire pour intégrer le marché du travail. Leurs apprentissages scolaires ne sont pas terminés; ils ont besoin de plus de temps. Si vous discutez avec des parents d'enfants qui arrivent à la fin de leur scolarité dans le secteur des jeunes, vous constaterez que tous vivent la même insécurité à savoir quelle sera la suite.

Il existe de nombreux programmes pour ces jeunes, mais il faut également prévoir qu'il y aura des listes d'attente. Rien n'est automatique comme pour les jeunes dits «ordinaires» qui ont accès aux cégeps, universités et écoles de métiers spécialisés. La route est différente et parfois cahoteuse. Les parents de ces enfants doivent faire des recherches et faire preuve d'originalité afin que leurs besoins soient comblés.

Il est certain qu'à 16 ans, Louis-Mathieu rêve d'avoir l'occasion d'occuper un petit travail d'été. Nous verrons si cela sera possible pour l'été qui vient.

Pour l'avenir, j'ai confiance, mon cher fils que tu sauras trouver ta voie. Ton père, ton frère et moi serons toujours auprès de toi afin que tu puisses t'épanouir comme adulte.

Julie René de Cotret est la directrice adjointe des services aux élèves, Commission scolaire English Montréal.

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

Angela Mancini, Chairman

Robert Stocker, Director General

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

Commission scolaire English-Montréal
English Montreal School Board

«Ce n'est pas toi que j'attendais», une bande dessinée touchante pour parents d'enfants différents

Par Fabien Toumé (Delcourt Paris, 2015)

Par Emmanuelle Assor

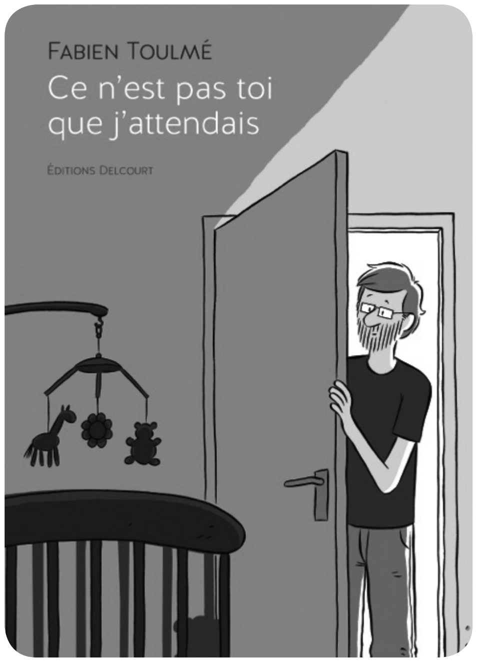
Derrière le titre très dur «Ce n'est pas toi que j'attendais», se cache un livre essentiel pour tout parent d'enfant handicapé. Ecrit par un Français nommé Fabien Toulmé, qui n'était pas bédéiste de métier mais plutôt ingénieur de formation, cette jolie bande dessinée s'adresse bel et bien aux adultes. En images monochromes toutes simples mais si percutantes, l'auteur nous raconte l'histoire de la naissance de sa deuxième fille. L'histoire touchante et introspective d'un futur papa terrifié par l'idée que sa fille puisse naître avec une trisomie 21, ce qui finit par arriver. Dur coup pour un père qui avait si peur de mettre au monde un enfant différent!

Au cours de ce récit autobiographique de 250 pages, l'auteur nous fait part de ses émotions, sans filtre ni jugement, de son immense déception, de sa peine qui semble sans fin, de sa colère face aux autres qui ont mis au monde des enfants «normaux», de son cheminement vers l'acceptation de sa fille et finalement de son amour grandissant pour elle. Ce récit, si cru parfois mais teinté d'autodérision, fait rire par moments, comme lorsque l'auteur se retrouve dans des forums de parents d'enfants trisomiques sur internet, cherchant à se rassurer puis finissant en larmes à cause des témoignages terribles d'autres parents vivant des choses encore plus difficiles que lui.

Dans un chapitre intitulé «Bienvenue à HandicapLand» l'auteur se rend d'un édifice médical à l'autre à la recherche de services pour son enfant, dépassé par les événements et inquiet de ne pas trouver les professionnels dont il aura besoin pour aider sa fille à se développer. Voilà un petit morceau de vie que tous les parents d'enfants différents ont vécu dans le plus grand stress, loin du regard de leurs amis et de leur famille. Mais comme ce livre le souligne, la plupart des parents donneraient tout pour leurs enfants et ce, malgré les difficultés quotidiennes.

Probablement sans le vouloir, Fabien Toulmé a écrit l'histoire de tous les parents d'enfants différents, qu'ils soient autistes, trisomiques, gravement malades, handicapés physiques ou déficients intellectuels. Cette histoire d'étapes d'acceptation d'une réalité autre que celle dont on avait rêvé, d'une vie plus facile pour notre enfant et pour nous, c'est notre histoire. C'est celle du choc de la différence, des hauts et des bas, des luttes et des sacrifices, des succès inespérés et de l'espoir retrouvé au détour d'un chemin, mais surtout de cet amour que l'on porte en soi malgré tout.

Après deux ans à apprivoiser sa fille et sa nouvelle vie, l'auteur conclut candidement: «Ce n'est pas toi que j'attendais… mais je suis quand même content que tu sois venue.» Un livre universel sur les rêves que l'on entretient, la perte des illusions et l'amour qui est plus fort que tout. A lire et à prêter à ceux qu'on aime.



Les éditions Regard9 : un nouveau regard sur les différences

Par Caroline Lebeau

Tous les enfants sont uniques. Petits, grands ou en fauteuil roulant, timides ou expressifs, drôles ou sympathiques, c'est cette diversité d'êtres humains qui a inspiré les éditions Regard9 à intégrer des personnages avec des personnalités et des habiletés variées dans ses livres.

Au Québec, peu de littérature jeunesse inclut des personnages vivant avec une déficience motrice, intellectuelle ou visuelle, la surdité, le trouble du déficit d'attention avec ou sans hyperactivité, le trouble du spectre autistique, le syndrome de Gilles de la Tourette et certains troubles d'apprentissage tels que la dysphasie et la dyslexie.

Les éditions Regard9 ont ainsi choisi de faire briller toutes les compétences et les qualités de personnages différents qui participent à l'action en tant qu'individu à part entière. Le résultat : des histoires imaginaires, colorées et dynamiques.

Dans le premier livre Les Champions dans l'espace, Kevin s'imagine que son fauteuil roulant se transforme en vaisseau spatial et qu'il s'envole vers la planète guimauve entourée de nuages de barbe à papa. À partir de ce moment, plusieurs péripéties s'enchaînent. Heureusement, Kevin est accompagné de ses amis qui joindront leurs efforts et leurs habiletés afin de trouver des solutions!

Dans le deuxième livre Les Champions au zoo, le père de Francis raconte une histoire spéciale qui se déroule au zoo. Grâce à ses pictogrammes, Francis, un jeune garçon autiste ainsi que ses compagnons vont unir leurs idées et leurs habiletés afin ramener l'ordre dans le zoo.

Afin de créer ces histoires imaginaires, nous avons embauché, entre autres, des personnes vivant une situation de handicap pour favoriser leur employabilité et démontrer leurs compétences artistiques. Merci Chantal, Valérie, Christopher, Amélie, Amine, Katy, Amélie et Jonathan. Tous aussi différents que vous êtes, vous avez apporté de la magie dans ces histoires !

Les Éditions Regard9 produisent également des guides de sensibilisation permettant à un adulte d'échanger avec un enfant sur les différences individuelles. Les échanges par la discussion et les jeux favorisent l'ouverture vers de nouveaux horizons et l'acceptation de l'autre se fait par une meilleure connaissance. Les illustrations sont accompagnées de fiches éducatives qui permettent de mieux comprendre le quotidien des personnes vivant des situations de handicap.

Afin de créer ces guides, plusieurs collaborateurs du réseau la santé et de l'éducation ont uni leur savoir-faire : nous remercions les commissions scolaires, les centres de réadaptation, les hôpitaux, les organismes communautaires, les parents et les enfants qui nous ont aidés et inspirés.

Pour en savoir plus ou pour vous procurer nos livres, visitez : www.regard9.ca

Les personnages en vedette dans les livres de divertissement et les guides de sensibilisation.

L'équipe des Éditions Regard en pleine création, Chantal, Valérie, Christopher, Amélie, Amine, Katy et Caroline. (Crédit photo : Jonathan B. Béland (www.prod.bbeland.com))

Peter Hall School's Gateway Program paves way for productive lifestyle filled with pride

By Elaine Cohen

Peter Hall School is a private school, located in Ville St-Laurent, recognized and subsidized by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS). The school provides specialized educational services to French and English-speaking students, aged four to 21. Students who attend Peter Hall School have intellectual disabilities, pervasive developmental disorders and psychopathological disorders, with or without associated disabilities. Currently, 236 students are enrolled in the elementary division and 246 attend the secondary level.

Peter Hall School provides a student-centered educational program that is guided by an Educational Profile and the Individualized Educational Plan (IEP). To complement these documents and to better prepare the students for adulthood, Ms. Sherilyn Ami, Vice Principal, alongside the Director of Educational Services, resource teachers and other pedagogues designed and implemented the Gateway Program.

"The primary goal of the Gateway Program is to open opportunities for our students' future by teaching skills that can be applied in different residence and community settings and that instill a sense of purpose to the students' everyday life," Ami said.

The program is divided into three subprograms. The Daily Living Subprogram reflects skills that students need to develop their autonomy and to be active participants in the family/home unit. For instance, students learn how to properly brush their teeth, take care of their appearance, dust a room, load a dishwasher and sweep a floor. They also learn about public transportation, pedestrian safety and the role of different community members.

The Play and Leisure Subprogram, develops the student's interests in a variety of leisure activities. One way this goal is achieved is through the implementation of lunchtime clubs, such as the Girls Club, where participants listen to teen music, learn how to do their hair and apply makeup.

The Pre-Vocational Subprogram provides students with internships that represent work opportunities and/or day program activities that may be available to Peter Hall School students when they graduate.

Peter Hall School Garden and Green House enthusiasts are budding horticulturalists. They play an active role in all aspects of the internship from purchasing plants and nurturing bulbs indoors to planting and tending gardens outside the school.

Thanks to the Peter Hall School Cantine, the staff room is a gourmet paradise every Wednesday. The participants' homemade baked goods and fresh brewed cappuccino, espresso, latte and hot chocolate are for sale in-house.

The pre-vocational program also explores community-vocational training. This year, two young adults, accompanied by a Special Education Technician, are completing an internship at a nearby grocery store, where they stock shelves and prepare fruit and vegetable items.

Students participate in the Gateway Program at Peter Hall School. (Photo courtesy of Peter Hall School)

Team teaching is essential in the program. It represents how most high schools function and benefits the students by providing opportunities to experience different teaching styles and to apply knowledge to new situations. One student became so adept at loading a school dishwasher that he began doing it at home. His parents were pleased because the young adult now participates in his family life. For information visti peterhall.qc.ca.

Shriners Hospital patient strives to overcome obstacles

By Caroline Phaneuf

Spartan Races are all about big obstacles, fitness, adventure and outdoors. Some serious competitors train for months. But 16-year-old Shriners Hospitals for Children - Canada patient Jeffrey Beausoleil proves that you can do anything you set your mind to. He will be running a Spartan Race on May 23 - with mud, water and obstacles - with prosthetics on both his right foot and hand. "I ran a race last year and realized it was 90 percent mental and 10 percent physical," he says. "I know that if I want to do it, I can."

Jeffrey was born with a congenital malformation and his limbs did not properly form. He was first seen at Canada's Shriners Hospitals when he was five months old. He underwent his first surgery at 16 months to correct webbed fingers on his left hand. He continues to be followed at the hospital and each growth spurt is equipped with new prosthetics.

"A lot of people are surprised hearing I'm doing a Spartan Race," Jeffrey admits. "Even friends ask me whether I can do it. But I plan to try every obstacle, and try it again if I can't the first time. If I realize I really can't do that obstacle, I'll just keep going and try the next one."

It's this message: 'obstacles can be overcome' that Shriners Hospitals for Children – Canada wants to highlight in its new partnership with Spartan Race. They're encouraging everyone to follow Jeffrey and try the challenge of a Spartan Race. There are even kids' races, starting at the age of four.

Money raised for Shriners Hospital for Children – Canada through the Spartan Race this year from May 17 to 24 at Mont Tremblant, will go towards the new state-of-the-art hospital being built at the Glen site that will allow them to welcome thousands more patients every year.

Anyone who agrees to raise money for them by participating, can email moncommunications@shrinenet.org to get a Special Shriners Promo Code, reducing an adult entrance fee significantly to $60 (instead of $90 to 150, depending on the race). Go to www.spartanrace.ca to learn more about Spartan Races and to view the upcoming race schedule. If you'd like to make a donation to Shriners Hospitals for Children – Canada Spartan Race, visit their website at www. www.exceptionalcare4kids.com.

Jeffery Beausoleil
(Photo credit, Benoit Desjardins)

March of Dimes Canada looks to grow in Montreal

By Ruth Kapelus

For many people, the name March of Dimes is synonymous with polio. And it is true that in the 1940s and '50s, our Marching Mothers fundraised door-to-door to raise money towards the discovery of a polio vaccine – which was eventually founded in 1955, virtually eradicating the scourge of the sometimes deadly and disabling virus in North America. But certainly, the work of March of Dimes didn't end with the discovery of a polio vaccine, it began.

For over 60 years, March of Dimes has been on the forefront of the disability movement in Canada. Today, March of Dimes provides a variety of important programs and services to over 55,000 Canadians with disabilities each year, and in Quebec provides programs like Conductive Education®, which helps improve mobility and self-confidence, employment supports, support for polio and stroke survivors, their loved ones and healthcare professionals, advocacy and more. We offer One Stop: Opportunities for Independence to children and adults with disabilities.

In 2015, March of Dimes Canada will celebrate the 10th Anniversary of its Rock for Dimes fundraiser in Montreal, a battle of the bands event that has allowed the charity to expand its programming in the city, including past offerings of Conductive Education in partnership with Centre Hyperbare.

In November 2014, for the first time, to help Quebec residents with physical disabilities, March of Dimes Canada, through the Istvan and Barbara Haas Assistive Devices and Vehicle Retrofit Fund, provided $10,000 to Montreal resident André Bougie to acquire a new powerchair.

André lives with spina bifida, is a double amputee and uses a manual wheelchair. Declining health and strength have made it harder for him to pursue the sports and recreational pursuits he so loves. He will use the funding towards the purchase of an electric wheelchair to play modified soccer. He is also the new President of Powerchair Soccer Canada, and the funding will help him grow this sport across Canada.

Montreal Conductive Education session. (Photo courtesy of March of Dimes Canada)

Funding from Rock for Dimes and other funding sources will allow March of Dimes to continue to expand its programming, and offer more French-language services in Montreal. The charity has a local volunteer committee that is seeking new opportunities for expansion and partnerships with other disability organizations.

For more information about March of Dimes Canada, please call 1-800-263-3463, visit www.marchofdimes.ca and follow us on Twitter @modcanada and on Facebook at www.facebook.com/marchofdimescanada

Ruth Kapelus is responsible for Media and Public Relations, March of Dimes Canada.

Montreal West children's librarian makes a difference for Giant Steps students

By Carole Boubalos

I am an assistant librarian at the Montreal West Children's Library. I manage the French collection, tell stories to visiting students from Elizabeth Ballantyne School and The Little Red Playhouse, and animate programs for babies and toddlers. I believe that the story of how I became an animator for visiting groups from Giant Steps School is a compelling one that proves it takes a village to raise a child.

In September of 2013, Amanda Dandy, an educator from Giant Steps, dropped by our library asking if she could bring a small group of children with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) for planned library visits. She was so earnest and sincere in her wish to help the children in her care. How could I refuse this fresh-faced and enthusiastic young lady?

I discussed the possibility with Lindsey Skeen, head librarian, who accessed a trove of pertinent information in the LISA (Library and Information Studies) database at McGill University. One article in particular stood out: Autism, Literacy, and Libraries: The 3 Rs = Routine, Repetition, and Redundancy, by Lynn Akin and Donna MacKinney (2004).

The authors described possible programming ideas and ended with this call to action: "Librarians have an opportunity to make a real contribution to the lives of children who face many challenges. Seize the chance and make a difference (Akin & MacKinney, p. 41, 2004)." This became my mantra for the year.

Thus was born the successful collaboration between Giant Steps and the Montreal West Children's Library. Throughout the year, I animated a variety of stories using puppets, stuffed animals and drawing boards. I brought fresh fruit in to animate Charlotte Zolotow's classic story Mr. Rabbit's Lovely Present.

This year, I thought that the children would benefit from having service dogs, so I purchased 10 small stuffed puppies. These "stuffies" now wear their owners' names around their necks and patiently wait for Friday mornings in a special crate.

Several children are non-verbal, so I teach the group some basic elements of sign language. We play guessing games and when needed, my volunteers join me in animating a story. These programs require planning and a good deal of imagination, but the rewards are great.

I do hope that these experiences will encourage other librarians to follow my lead and make a difference. You won't regret it!

Carol Boubalos with stuffed service dogs at the Montreal West Children's Library (Photo courtesy of Carol Boubalos)

Reference

Akin, L., & MacKinney, D. (2004). Autism, literacy, and libraries: The 3 Rs= routine, repetition, and redundancy. Children and Libraries, 35-43.

Inspirations Notebook

Wendy Singer

The Spring/Summer 2015 edition of Inspirations is packed with inspiring news and new collaborators. We are excited to introduce you to **Frank Verpaelst,** who shares his insights on dwarfism and focusing on abilities, and **Christopher Simeone**, who explains how his learning disability became his greatest strength. Don't miss **Jay Jones-Doyle**'s popular column that imparts great wisdom on the correlation of self-esteem and success. This edition informs about exciting initiatives like Jooay, AUMI, LEGO® Therapy, The Pirates - Montreal's sledge hockey team, and the many reputable resources in our community.

We appreciate the support of our loyal advertisers and sponsors, and urge you to take a look at their websites, which you can find on their advertisements and on the sponsor page of our website. We are proud to partner with **The March of Dimes** as they reach out to the Greater Montreal and surrounding areas, and welcome our new sponsor, **CJAD 800 AM**.

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In collaboration with the **Montreal Community Cares Foundation**, the **CJAD Heroes** segment with **Andrew Carter** highlights individuals who are making special efforts to give back to the people and city of Montreal.

We provided CJAD with a long list of our community members that are heroes in our eyes (it was a very long list…). They chose to recognize **L'Étoile de Pacho**, a support group for parents of children with multiple physical disabilities spearheaded by **Caroline Elias** and **Nathalie Richard**, both parents of children with special needs, and **Nick Katalifos**, chairman of Giant Steps School and Rescource Centre, principal of Roslyn School, special advisor to Inspirations, autism advocate, and parent. Visit www.cjad.com/heroes to view videos of these CJAD Heroes segments. Congratulations to all of our heroes!

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The YM-YWHA Indoor TrYathlon raised over $13,500 for special needs programming. This inaugural event which took place on February 21, brought 24 participant teams and individuals together to compete in a 15-minute swim, 30-minute bike, and 20-minute run. A spirited crew of volunteers was on hand to cheer everyone on, encouraging a fun-filled and friendly competition.

Anthony Housefather, Mayor of Côte Saint-Luc, Liberal Candidate for Mount Royal riding and reigning Maccabiah Games Masters Swim champion, aced the swim portion, with **Ann Walling** a very close second. **Laura Telio** shined in the cycling leg, and **Elise Levinoff** was the top runner. The overall winner and woman's champion was **Cheryl Polansky**. Mayor Housefather came in second place and was the men's champion. The true winners of the day were the people who participate in the YM-YWHA's vibrant special needs programming.

Congratulations to all who participated, including top fundraiser **Steven Lach**. Look out for the Y Cycle for Special Needs coming up on September 27, 2015 where riders have the choice of a 100km or 50km route and then enjoy a delicious lunch at the Hillsdale Golf and Country Club. Visit cycle.ymywha.com to join the ride or to make a donation.

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Open Access: The Art of Inclusion, Concordia University's Art Education Graduate Symposium, took place on February 6 and 7 to rave reviews. This year's symposium focused on social inclusion and accessibility for the arts. The organizing committee, spearheaded by graduate student **Anna Timm-Bottos**, M.A. in Art Education and President of the Art Education Graduate Student Association, welcomed keynote speaker **Judith Snow**, a social innovator, visual artist and advocate for social inclusion who has pioneered education and training programs that have changed the lives of thousands of people.

We attended a presentation that merged two art programs that are currently underway at the Mackay Centre School: **Luca "Lazylegz" Patuelli**'s Projet RAD, and AUMI (Adaptive Use Musical Instrument), presented by **Professor Eric Lewis**, McGill Site Coordinator for International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI) and **Dr. Keiko Shikako-Thomas**, School of Physical and Occupational Therapy, McGill University.

After formal presentations, the two groups merged for what turned out to be the dance party of the year. Mackay students created live music using AUMI, to which Projet RAD dancers showed off their moves. It was not long before the entire audience was on the dance floor with them. It was an incredibly joyful moment as these organizations powered the message home that anyone with the will can create music, and dance. To read more about AUMI turn to page 23 of this edition.

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The Arthritis Society and **Concordia University's PERFORM Centre** share a common mission: to prevent and treat chronic illness through lifestyle changes, including fitness and nutrition.

The first of its kind in North America, PERFORM is a state-of-the-art research platform that unites scientists, students and the public to discover and test new ways of thinking about disease prevention and making better health choices. The Arthritis Society is currently funding the research of **Dr. Shawn Robbins**, who uses PERFORM's facilities.

On April16, The Arthritis Society and PERFORM celebrated their collaboration at a reception at the Loyola Jesuit Hall and Conference Centre. Guests enjoyed viewing the beautiful and vast collection of watercolour art and sculptures created by retired art teacher, artist and Laval native **George E. Russell**, who, for many years, has generously offered his works for sale for the benefit of The Arthritis Society.

On hand were **Alan Klinkhoff**, former curator of contemporary art at the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, former Habs favourite **Chris Nilan**, who shared his lifelong battle with arthritis, and **Elizabeth Kennell** and **Diane De Bonville** from The Arthritis Society. Guests were treated to a tour of the magnificent PERFORM Centre by **Axel Bergman**, Manager, Research Development at the PERFORM Centre.

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The 3rd Montreal Autism in Motion Conference and Exhibit, spearheaded by **Tracy Pennimpede** and **Andre Periera**, took place on March 22, and was a resounding success, with over 350 people, including parents, health care professionals, students, individuals with an ASD, educators and exhibitors in attendance

Presented in collaboration with **McGill University** and **Giant Steps School**, speakers included **John Elder Robison** on how he overcame enormous odds to lead a fulfilling life with Asperger's Syndrome, popular host and actor **Charles Lafortune**, and **Randy Lewis**, past Senior Vice President of Walgreens' logistics division.

Lewis shared his unparalleled disability employment initiative at Walgreens which saw 40 percent of the workforce in their distribution centres comprised of people with disabilities of all kinds. This centre became their most efficient one. Visit the Montreal Autism in Motion Facebook page for excellent video clips that share more about this fascinating initiative.

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The Gold Centre's Current Trends in ASD Conference 2015, held from March 31 to April 2, welcomed 650 attendees over the three-day span of the conference. Targeted to teachers, this conference welcomed parents and professionals who work with children and adolescents with an autism spectrum disorder. The conference featured distinguished experts in the field, including **Jed Baker**, who discussed social skills training, local expert **Isabelle Hénault**, who addressed sexual education for adolescents with an ASD, **Catherine Faherty**, on self-knowledge and self-advocacy in school-aged children with ASD, and **Peter Vermeulen**, who addressed autism as context blindness.

We had the opportunity to hear **Brenda Smith Myles**, author of The Hidden Curriculum: Practical Solutions for Understanding Rules in Social Situations and many other books on the topic, speak about The Hidden Curriculum, which refers to the set of rules or guidelines that are often not directly taught but assumed to be known, such as unspoken rules, slang, metaphors, body language, and others. Through her humour and engaging examples, Smith Myles provided practical tips for teaching children and adults the hidden social curriculums.

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Students from The Mackay Centre School's grades 1 and 2 classes participated in the **FIRST® LEGO® League (Jr. FLL) Robotics Competition** in Montreal on March 20. Sponsored by FIRST and **The LEGO Foundation**, the competition is a Think Tank Challenge that aims to redefine learning through the use of LEGO and play.

The project was a great success thanks to **Sara Iatauro**, Education Consultant, Science & Technology Elementary, Robotics K-11, EMSB, Principal **Patrizia Ciccarelli**, **Gaye McConnell**, resource and media teacher, teachers **Jessica Palmer** and **Kathleen Timney**, and all students involved.

On April 23, the team welcomed **Caspar Aarlit Jensen**, Program and Partnerships Officer at The LEGO Foundation, who came in from Denmark to see the models that Montreal students created using LEGO pieces, motors and machines. Highly impressed, he explained that LEGO donated all of the WeDo kits and charity boxes of LEGO.

Also on hand for the visit was **Paul LeBrun**, President, Brault & Bouthillier, **Donald Gaudreau**, Education Consultant, Science & Technology, Commission Scolaire de la Pointe-de-l'Ile, and **Brigitte Coulombe**, Principal of École Pie XII.

L'Étoile de Pacho's Caroline Elias, Program Coordinator, and Nathalie Richard, Founder, at CJAD. (Photo credit, Paris Mansouri, @CJAD800).

Sara Iatauro, Donald Gaudreau, Brigitte Coulombe, Patrizia Ciccarelli, Caspar Aarlit Jensen, Paul LeBrun, Gaye McConnell, Jessica Palmer, and Kathleen Timney with The Mackay Centre School's Sweeter Than Honey Lego® Education WeDo model for the School of the Future program.

Andre Pereira, Nick Katalifos, Randy Lewis, and Tracy Pennimpede at the Montreal Autism in Motion Conference and Exhibit.

Elizabeth Kennell, Alan Klinkhoff, George E. Russell, Chris Nilan, and Diane De Bonville at The Arthritis Society and Concordial University's PERFORM Centre reception.

Mayor of Côte Saint-Luc and Liberal Candidate for Mount Royal riding Anthony Housefather and Neil Uditsky, Director of Financial Resource Development, YM-YWHA at the YM-YWHA Indoor TrYathlon (Photo courtesy of the YM-YWHA).

Mackay Centre School students, Luca "Lazylegz" Patuelli, and Projet R.A.D. dancers at Concordia University's Art of Inclusion Symposium.

Julie Klucinskas, Program Coordinator at The Gold Centre, and Brenda Smith Myles at the Current Trends in ASD Conference 2015.

Grade 1 and 2 Mackay Centre School students at the FIRST® LEGO® League (Jr.FLL) Robotics Competition in Montreal (Photo courtesy of Robotique FIRST Québec)

Axel Bergman giving a tour of Concordia University's PERFORM Centre.

Steven Lach at the YM-YWHA Indoor TrYathlon.

Jessica Palmer and Gaye McConnell with one of the LEGO® models exhibited by Mackay Centre School students at the FIRT® LEGO® League (Jr.FLL) Robotics Competition in Montreal.

Dr. Keiko Shikako-Thomas, Assistant Professor at McGill's School of Physical and Occupational Therapy, and Eric Lewis, McGill Site Coordinator for the International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI).

How my Learning Disability became my greatest strength

By Christopher Simeone

I am a human, diagnosed with a Learning Disability (LD) and because of this diagnosis, I have had my share of hardships. An LD affects the process of taking in and expressing information, which is done in many ways, including talking, using our hands, hearing, seeing, and many more.

Growing up, I felt as though I was worthless because of my flaws. For example, who wants to be friends with someone who can't talk or someone who can't read? Over time, I learnt that I had these flaws because of how my brain is wired. I also learnt that I can overcome these flaws by adapting to the world around me.

Speech-language pathologists helped me with my speech. Assistive technology helped me with my reading. Having an LD made me see the world for what it really is; a world where people are in pain, pain for not being able to meet the social quota.

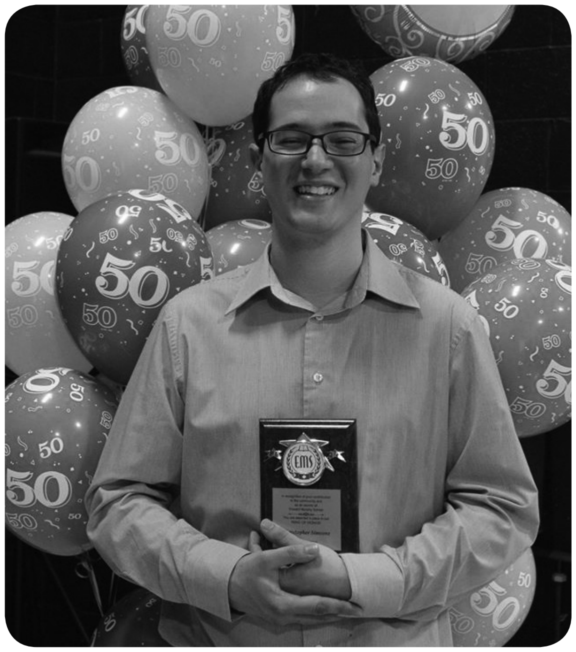
At the age of seven, I was forced to see my flaws because that is when I was diagnosed with an LD. But at the same time I embarked on a journey; a journey to accepting myself. I learnt about what I cannot change, what I can change, and through experience, discovered the wisdom to know the difference.

My flaws have now become my greatest strengths. They have taught me to be empathetic and a good listener instead of someone who judges and insults others for their flaws. In my favourite movie, titled Music Within, there is a statement that has become my mission: "You don't have to change their minds about people's disabilities, you need to change their minds about themselves."

I have an LD, but I am truly human. We are all humans and we all have flaws. The difference is that some of us are diagnosed and have an official label for our flaws. There is a quote by Lao Tzu about peace. He says, "The only way to have peace in the world is for everyone to be at peace in their own heart."

The answer to all of our questions is found within ourselves. I hope I have opened your heart and mind.

Christopher Simeone is a graduate of Special Care Counselling at Vanier College, a student in the Inclusive Education Certificate program at McGill University, an Ambassador for the Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities, speaker and Laughter Yoga Leader.



Christopher Simeone was one of four alumni honoured for his accomplishments at Edward Murphy Elementary School's 50th anniversary event on April 24, 2015.

LBPSB and Camp Bosco bring the Snoezelen® approach to students

By Alison Reichert and Mireille Abadie

A new partnership brings an exciting new resource to our off-island community. The Lester B Pearson School Board, in collaboration with Camp Bosco, have developed two rooms inspired by the Snoezelen® approach to provide multi-sensory stimulation sessions followed by relaxation sessions. The rooms are equipped with specialized lighting, textured material, different scents, colourful tubes, fiber-optic materials, different size and coloured patterns and shapes.

This project was developed to allow children to have an experience where they are not told what to do, what not to do, and are allowed to just be. This provides moments where each child can build on their strengths, develop autonomy, discover and explore the environment freely.

In these dedicated rooms, the children are encouraged to touch and feel the different equipment. They experience moments of stimulation and discovery during the stimulation session, and during the relaxation session they experience soothing and calming moments.

Camp Bosco has provided a resource for children to have time and space to reflect, explore and build the capacity to better self-regulate. The Camp Bosco special education technician is specifically trained to base her interventions using the Snoezelen approach, which consist of intervening minimally to encourage the development of independence and exploration of freedom.

A third aspect built into the sessions at Camp Bosco is an activity centre where students have an opportunity to play collaboratively or on their own using hands-on activities. A LBPSB special education technician accompanies the children at Camp Bosco and plays an active role during playtime. At school, she encourages students to implement what they've learned at Camp. We recognize the importance of this type of collaboration; the children learn many important skills needed to be successful in the school environment.

Pierre Elliot Trudeau (PETES) and Edgewater Elementary Schools are involved in this pilot project. Their students attend Camp Bosco weekly, and both staff and students report enthusiasm for going to Camp Bosco and their enjoyment in participating in the sessions.

The need for the resources at Camp Bosco are well recognized. So much so, PETES will begin to dedicate space and accumulate equipment to recreate the experience of Camp Bosco right in their school building. To better intervene using the Snoezelen approach, PETES staff will attend a training session.

Students Antony, Joel, Zachary, and Keiran having fun at Camp Bosco. (Photo credit, Susan Scallon)

The students participating in the multi-sensory stimulation project have shown progression in several ways. We recognize the students' familiarization with this new environment and the trust built with the new staff members. The students are following a routine and have been better able to collaborate with each other and play cooperatively. The relaxation sessions bring the students to a level where they are able to remain calm and restful for extended periods of time. The change of pace at Camp Bosco gives the students an opportunity to experience relaxation, to explore and enjoy their surroundings.

Alison Reichert is a Consultant for Special Needs, and Mireille Abadie Prevention is a Health Promotion Consultant, at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

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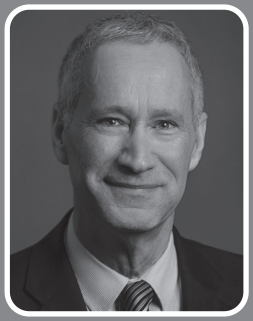

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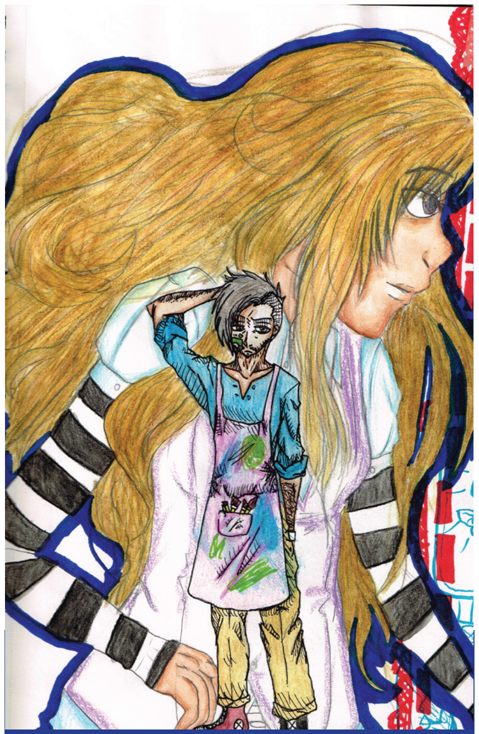

Soon to be Romance (pencil, watercolor, pastel, sharpie, fine point marker)

Iris (pencil, sharpie, watercolor)

Amethyst (watercolor)

Featuring artist Sky Gagnier

Sky Gagnier is from Oka, Quebec, and is currently a student at John Grant High School. Her interests include anime, manga, art, music, and singing, and she aspires to be an illustrator or cartoonist. Sky has been drawing for 13 years.

Adam's PACE Work-Oriented Training Path Program celebrates 10 years

By Marina Bresba

Adam's PACE began with a dream: Adam Taylor dreamed of attending CEGEP. As a young man with Down Syndrome, Adam had always attended inclusive schools. As his classmates prepared for graduation and college, Adam wondered: Would he be able to go to college, too?

It was Adam's dream, supported by his parents' perseverance and the vision of the Riverside School Board and Champlain College in Saint-Lambert, that resulted in the establishment of the first PACE class in August 2005.

What makes Adam's PACE special is the fact that it is an inclusive program where 17 to 21-year-old students with intellectual or developmental disabilities study alongside their same-age peers in a college environment.

Adam's PACE is a Work-Oriented Training Path program, helping students develop academic skills with real-life applications. Through community work-stages, students also learn the behaviours and skills necessary to succeed in a variety of trades.

PACE students study at Champlain College. They choose one college course to audit each semester, join clubs, participate in extracurricular activities, organize events, make friends, and participate in college life. They are college students. And after three years, they walk across the stage at convocation with all the other college graduates.

Parents of new students are hopeful and apprehensive: The college seems big and "grown-up." But the move from high school can have a significant impact. Emmett Zentner, a first year student, says that "Bullying stopped [since coming to PACE]. It helps me think more straight about moving on to other stuff."

Parents of graduating students regularly remark about the positive change and growth in their child – who is no longer a child, but a young adult, pursuing a successful adult life. "PACE has prepared me for when I finish… There is so much to be proud of… and thanks to the program, we get to be a part of college life as well," says Christopher Dymond, a graduating student.

The next year is a big one for Adam's PACE. We will be using our 10th anniversary as a chance to celebrate our successes, to promote awareness of the program, and to look toward the future. We are planning an Open House, a fundraiser featuring the I Can Dream Theatre Group, a conference for and by youth with disabilities, and an alumni dinner.

Marina Bresba is the Program Coordinator and Core Teacher of the Adam's PACE program. You may contact her about applying to Adam's PACE or for information about their events at mbresba@rsb.qc.ca, (450) 672-7360 ext. 350, or (514) 220-8463. More information about Adam's PACE can be found at http://tinyurl.com/infoPACE.

Jeremy Karzon and Kelly Pinard prepare to graduate alongside their peers at Champlain College's convocation. (Photo courtesy of Marina Bresba)


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Adapted Use Musical Instrument (AUMI): Making music at Mackay Centre School

Mackay Centre School-McGill University project aims to discover if adapted music instrument software can help kids with disabilities reach rehabilitation and learning goals

By Russ Cooper

As he turns his head to the left, Phillip creates the sound of a G chord. A look to the right, a rich C chord. Looking straight ahead, Phillip's eyes and face light up with satisfaction.

A music lover all his life, the 17-year-old with cerebral palsy is for the first time playing two chords that form the backbone of a song. And not just any song. As yet untitled, this is the first song from Bacon Blue Deer, the group he and his Mackay Centre School classmates have formed that uses AUMI, or the Adapted Use Musical Instrument, to make their music.

AUMI, a software interface for PC, Mac, iPhone and iPad, uses a computer's webcam to translate movement and gestures into music. It's an accessible, customizable, and versatile way to make music for those with deficits that may limit their ability to participate in musical activities.

Since its development in 2007, AUMI has been used primarily as an artistic tool for exploring music via improvisation. Sensing its possibilities, a McGill University research team is investigating its further uses.

In collaboration with the Mackay Centre School, the McGill team is studying if AUMI can contribute to the achievement of the educational goals of students aged between five and 17 with physical and cognitive disabilities.

“By beginning with a focus on socialization, communication, and what matters to them, we're seeing very positive changes in areas such as social engagement, the ability to complete multi-step tasks, self-esteem,” says Dr. Keiko Shikako-Thomas, Assistant Professor at McGill's School of Physical and Occupational Therapy. “These are key elements to succeeding at school.”

“AUMI has also contributed significantly to our students' emotional and creative growth,” says Patrizia Ciccarelli, Mackay Centre School Principal. “This gives them a chance to participate actively in music making, improvising, and feel part of a community.”

Phillip (third from right) was one of five Mackay Centre School students demonstrating AUMI at Concordia University symposium The Art of Inclusion, a showcase of current research exploring art and accessibility held on February 6. (Photo credit, Wendy Singer)

Shikako-Thomas and her team work in collaboration with Professor Eric Lewis, a member of the international AUMI research team, who oversees the AUMI development work done at McGill in his capacity as the McGill Site Coordinator for International Institute for Critical Studies in Improvisation (IICSI).

Phase 2 will begin this summer as a group of McGill Occupational and Physical Therapy students will develop guidelines for AUMI's use in school and rehabilitation settings. The long-term goal is for AUMI to become a go-to tool to help achieve a wide range of physical and cognitive objectives, as well as to promote creativity, community building, and cultural enrichment.

In support, the effort has recently received a generous grant of $9,500 from the Rick Hansen Foundation for the purchase of new AUMI-equipped iPads and computers.

Learn more about and download AUMI at www.deeplistening.org/site/adaptiveuse and on iTunes.

LEGO® Therapy at the Lester B. Pearson School Board

By Ruth Schwarcz

The LEGO® Therapy pilot project was launched this year at the Lester B. Pearson School Board due to generous grants from the Pearson Education Foundation and Entrepreneurial Grant.

LEGO Therapy supports inclusion of students with autism and other social communication deficits by improving social competencies. This intervention capitalizes on children's natural interest and enjoyment with the LEGO building system. Three schools have initiated LEGO Therapy pilot groups with students ranging from grade 3 to grade 5. Our project trains staff in the basics of LEGO Therapy so that schools can begin new groups in the 2015-16 school year.

During each session, group participants are given a specific role - Supplier, Builder or Engineer. The Supplier collects the materials and shares them with the Builder. The Engineer gives the builder step-by-step instructions based on visual cues. The Builder follows each direction to achieve the final product. The roles are then switched. This highly structured format encourages turn taking, initiation with peers, giving and receiving instructions as well as organization and leadership skills. Students learn problem solving strategies as a result of working through a variety of challenges associated with the LEGO Therapy format. Each session is collaborative with inherent interdependence on peers.

Social competence is the long-term goal of this project. Students whose communication skills and self-regulatory skills are enhanced become more fully included in their classroom environments. Each session includes 'Social Thinking' concepts such as 'Whole Body Listening' and 'Expected and Unexpected Behaviours' (concepts developed by Michelle Garcia Winner). Whole Body Listening and Social Thinking encourage students to understand the basic components of communication.

By keeping their bodies in the group they show that they want to be part of the group. By listening and being quiet they show that they are interested in what others are saying. In order for participants to understand and give directions they need to learn to respond to body language and gestures. The students are supported and cued regarding how to interpret and respond to body language. Group leaders use the terms 'expected and unexpected' to reflect on behaviors and to create an environment of respect within the group. And then they get to practice the skills while having some LEGO fun!

Students participating in LEGO Therapy at Christmas Park Elementary School.

For more information regarding LEGO Therapy, contact Ruth Schwarcz at (514) 422-3000, ext: 32417.

Ruth Schwarcz is a Special Needs Consultant at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

New SEEDS class supports students at the EMSB

By Lori Rubin

For some elementary school children, going to school every day, getting along with peers and following basic rules and routines, can be a daunting task. Add to that a history of a traumatic event in their life, possible attachment issues, and inconsistencies within their family situation, and you have the makings of a child who simply cannot cope with the demands of a regular classroom environment.

An alternative type of grade one/two classroom was set up at St. Gabriel School in Pointe St. Charles in August 2012 to meet the needs of these students. SEEDS stands for Supporting the Emotional and Educational Development of Students. After experiencing significant success, Jim Daskalakis, the principal, opened a second SEEDS class at St. Gabriel School for children in grades two/three the following year.

As the school year progressed, administrators and teachers expressed the need for this type of environment for kindergarten children who fit the same criteria, and in January 2015 a third SEEDS class was opened at Pierre Elliot Trudeau School (PET) in the Rosemount, Petite-Patrie district, in order to support students at the kindergarten/grade one level in the east end. Although the staff involved with the PET SEEDS class only had two weeks from the time the class was approved to the time they received their first student, with the unwavering support of principal Anna Sanalitro, they managed to put together a clean, well-structured and welcoming classroom complete with a well-structured research-based program which focuses on social-emotional learning using attachment-based theories of education. Students are taught to be accountable for their actions which helps them to ultimately increase self-regulation and reduce disruptive, acting-out behaviours.

Each SEEDS class consists of a maximum of eight students, with a teacher and special education technician who are specialized in and committed to working with children who display behaviour/emotional/social problems. Both schools have a specially-designed sensory room where students can go to for short periods of time if they need to "chill out", reflect on their actions, or de-escalate when in a heightened state of emotion.

SEEDS program at Pierre Elliot Trudeau School, with Amanda Collet, special education technician and Jessica O'Meara, teacher.

The ultimate goal is to eventually re-integrate these students back into a regular classroom setting where they can apply the self-control strategies they have learned while in the SEEDS class. For some students, that can happen within a relatively short period of time, while with others, who may have ingrained maladaptive patterns of social interaction, it can take longer. However long it takes, the skilled and compassionate SEEDS teams put their heart and soul into supporting the children who are lucky enough to participate in this program.

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

Parkdale Elementary School's ASD Community Evening: Connecting students, families and the school community

By Tania Piperni, M.Ed.

Parkdale Elementary School, of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), is an English Core school in the St. Laurent area that has a large population of students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD). The school has four specialized classes for students with ASD, and both the student body and the teachers are very sensitized to interacting with them.

The teachers have formed the Parent and Family Involvement Committee in order to unite teachers, parents and students. A subgroup of these teachers organized an ASD Community Evening to help Parkdale parents that have children with ASD. Along with the school principal, Marylène Perron, this subcommittee was spearheaded by teachers Jennifer Poupart, Janna Maggio, Shelley Sokoloff, and Alba Cano Juarez.

Each of these teachers has a particular interest and specialty in working with students with ASD. "With such a large population of families with children with ASD, we want to recognize them as an important part of our school community," explains Poupart. "We want to empower parents to begin forming links with one another, as we know how important it is to feel supported both within the community as well as at school."

The ASD Community Evening began with families enjoying pizza together. While the children watched a movie, parents were free to ask teachers questions and peruse through books, materials, and visuals that were on display. Parents were also welcome to speak to me in my role of ASD Consultant at the EMSB.

Parents were also offered a tour of the new Snoezelen® room that was created at Parkdale. This room offers a multi-sensory environment specially designed to both soothe and stimulate various senses. Fiberoptic lighting, soothing music, and textured manipulatives are all included in this room in order to allow students with special needs, especially those with ASD, a soothing environment. This room was made possible through the collaboration of the daycare department at the EMSB.

Alba Cano Juarez, Janna Maggio, Shelley Sokoloff, Jennifer Poupart and principal Marylène Peron at Parkdale Elementary School.

The ASD Community Evening for parents was a great success. The organizing committee was very happy with the turnout of parents and they hope to hold this evening annually.

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

Registered Disability Savings Plans benefit families

By Nathan Leibowitz

The Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP) can provide up to $90,000 of benefits for families coping with disabled individuals. This plan, implemented by the government back in 2008, has had a very slow uptake rate mainly because it is not easily understood.

This plan can be set up for a Canadian resident with a valid Social Insurance Number who qualifies for the federal disability tax credit. There are generous bonds and grants that the government will contribute which can add up to $4,500 each year. The bond is worth up to $1,000 per year which the government will contribute to the plan if the beneficiary's net family income is below $43,561. If the beneficiary is over 18 years of age, this threshold is based on their income even if they are dependant on their parents. To benefit from this, a plan must be opened.

The grant is a matching program based on family income. If family income is below $87,123, the government will match up to $3,500 for your $1,500 contribution. If income is above, they will match dollar for dollar on the first $1,000. These amounts carry forward from 2008, so if you have not maximized, there can be a small windfall waiting for you.

Because the government mandated these plans to help care for these individuals for the long-term, this plan should be used for long-term savings only. If you make a withdrawal within 10 years, you will have to repay the government 300 percent of the withdrawal. Also, you must ensure that the beneficiary will remain eligible for the disability tax credit. Otherwise, the plan will have to be collapsed and government monies repaid. Also, if the individual is over 18, he/she has to be the one to manage the plan. The government has put in a temporary provision that parents can still open the plan for their children of majority in certain situations.

Withdrawals from the plan must begin when the beneficiary turns 60 years old. You can begin earlier but there is a maximum of either 10 percent or a predetermined government formula which is based on age.

If you are at a certain income level, your $1,500 annual contribution can attract an additional $4,500 from the government. If you multiply that by 20 years, that is $120,000 of investment value before any earnings on the investment, with only $30,000 contributed by the families.

This is a simple explanation to a complicated product. As with any investment, it should be a part of an overall comprehensive plan to ensure that it fits with other pieces of what you are trying to accomplish.

Nathan Leibowitz is an Investment Advisor with Manulife Securities Incorporated. For information call 514.798.0470.

2015 ANNUAL EMSB NIGHT

Thank you to the English Montreal School Board and The Montreal Impact for a fabulous fundraising event on May 6.

Some of the proceeds from ticket sales went to Inspirations.

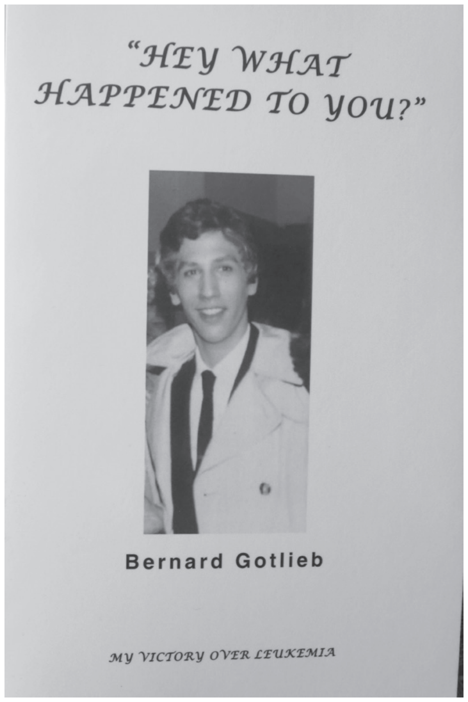
It was a great night!

If you would like to donate, or raise funds for Inspirations, contact us at info@inspirationsnews.com.

Special thanks to Inspirations Sports Editor Daniel Smajovits for his hard work planning this event.

Inspirational Book Review

"Hey What Happened To You?": My Victory Over Leukemia by Bernard Gotlieb (Privately published, $19.95)


"HEY WHAT HAPPENED TO YOU?"

Bernard Gotlieb

MY VICTORY OVER LEUKEMIA

By Stuart Nulman

In 1977, 19-year-old Bernard Gotlieb was living a happy middle class existence in his native Côte Saint-Luc. However, during a plane trip home from a winter vacation in Florida, Gotlieb experienced some blockage in his ears, and went to see a doctor.

Because the doctor was seeing Gotlieb for the first time, he was subjected to a battery of medical tests, including a blood test. When the blood test results looked slightly irregular, the doctor requested another one for Gotlieb; however, the end result was a rather startling one: he was diagnosed with leukemia.

Back in the late '70s, leukemia was practically a death sentence, and any treatments that were available were debilitating, painful and had no guarantee of success. However, such a dire diagnosis did not deter Gottlieb, as he decided to embark on a six-week trip to Israel, pursued a degree in tourism management and established his own Scrabble club (which is still in operation). In June of 1979, Gotlieb decided to take a major step in his battle against leukemia: a bone marrow transplant (which was still in the experimental stages) that was only available at the Princess Margaret Hospital in Toronto. And on top of that, his sister Gloria's marrow was a compatible match, and she was more than happy to take that risky measure of donating it towards increasing the chances of her brother's survival against that dreaded disease. As a result, he became one of the first leukemia patients to undergo – and survive - a bone marrow transplant in Canada, a treatment that is so common these days.

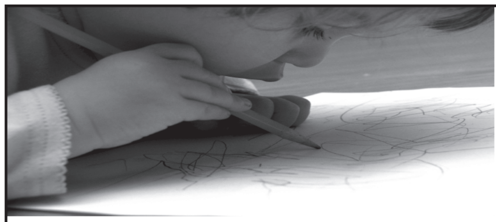
The story of Bernard Gotlieb's up and down road to successfully battling leukemia is told in honest, personal detail in his privately-published memoir "Hey What Happened To You?" He chronicles his struggles with a lot of humanity and humor, and the message the reader gets is that through the more than 30 years since his diagnosis and subsequent bone marrow transplant, Gotlieb has never given up on the idea of beating this disease, and restoring himself to his normal way of life and pursuing the passions that have kept him going through such difficult times.


Vice-Principal Christina Celzi with Bernard Gotlieb and students at Royal Vale School.

And what difficulties he has endured… infections, a series of extended hospital stays, injuries, accidents, operations, medical procedures, financial strains, a brain tumor, and a worsening skin condition that led to the amputation of both his legs. Yet somehow, through the love and support of friends and family, Gotlieb has managed to maintain a normal life, in which he runs a games class at Royal Vale elementary school (and four other schools in the city's east end), tutoring students in math, French, English and Spanish at his home and being director of the Scrabble club he established more than 30 years ago.

"Hey What Happened To You?" is a memoir of an individual who valiantly fought back against leukemia, no matter what setbacks and obstacles were thrown at him, and serves as a true inspiration for anyone who has to face their own battles for their lives. If such an individual can define "courageous" and "survivor", Bernard Gotlieb certainly is that individual.

If you're interested in purchasing a copy of Bernard Gotlieb's book, contact him at bgotlieb@gmail.com.



Choir founders tap talent, transcend tribulations and triumph

By Elaine Cohen

One need only listen to the United Tribulation Choir's repertoire of R&B, Gospel and jazz accented with African rhythms to admire Paul and Gift Tshuma's ingenuity. The choir has blossomed since the brothers founded it in 2007.

The 18-member choir features vocalists and a cadre of skilled bass, piano, drums, saxophone, trumpet and harmonica players. They perform original and cover songs for events and fundraisers at churches and centres.

The journey from Zimbabwe to Montreal began in 2001, when Paul and Gift, along with their mother, Zibusiso, relocated to benefit from motorized wheelchairs and support unavailable in Africa. Born with muscular dystrophy, Paul, 36, and Gift, 25, have never had use of their legs and have limited control of their hands.

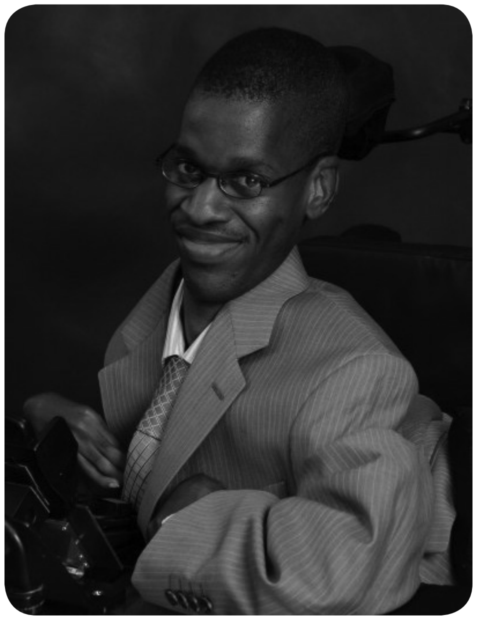
"We acknowledge our limitations but don't allow them to inhibit us from what we want to achieve in life," Paul says. "Now we aim to inspire others by sharing our love of God and music through choir."

Gift concurs. "When you show people what you can do, it inspires them to lend support." Singing is part of their daily routine.

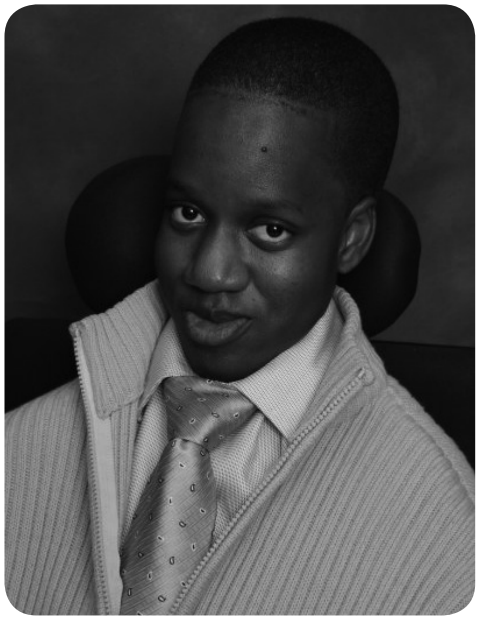
Paul's mother gave him a harmonica when he attended King George Memorial School and he formed a band. He also began writing poetry. Five of Paul's seven books have been published.

Gift attended Mackay and Westmount High schools (EMSB) in Montreal. "I was surrounded by people that encouraged me," he relates. At Westmount High, Gift honed his public speaking skills, entered and won competitions.

After high school, Gift enrolled at Dawson College to attend CEGEP, continued public speaking and became a motivational speaker. A newspaper article on Gift's achievements drew the attention of marketing guru Robert Soroka, who teaches at Dawson and Concordia University. "Professor Soroka offered to mentor us," Gift recalls. "Our plan included applying to perform at the Jazz Festival." Soroka's guidance led to a demo CD and a web site. Mira Choquette assumed the managerial role in 2014.



Paul Tshuma, singer, founder and leader of the United Tribulation Choir. (Photo courtesy of UT Choir)



Gift Tshuma, singer, founder and vice-leader of the United Tribulation Choir. (Photo courtesy of UT Choir)

The brothers are immersed in degree programs at Concordia University. Gift is slated to earn a BA in December 2015 and Paul follows suit with a BMus in 2016. "Momentarily, we are focusing on school and recordings, so concerts are on hold," Paul points out.

Paul transcribes compositions through computer notation. The system synthesizes sounds enabling him to orchestrate pieces. Gift composes rough drafts before brainstorming with Paul, who integrates arrangements. Paul and Gift are regulars at Trinity Pentecostal Church in LaSalle. They started out at Evangel Pentecostal Church downtown.

To learn more about the United Tribulation Choir, visit www.utchoir.com.

The Guzzo Family supports mental health research for children

By Wendy Singer

Maria Guzzo, Vice-President and head of charitable donations, and Vincenzo Guzzo, Executive Vice-President and head of operations, are shifting the Guzzo Cinemas' and Guzzo family's charitable energies from research in the field of environment-cancer to child mental health research. Profits will be distributed primarily to the non-profit organization, the Kids Write Network (KWN), which is an intervention based on a narrative and therapeutic process involving five stages.

Founded and directed by Helen Georgaklis, KWN aims to get children to write books for children while sharing their experiences through the exploration of life lessons. Dr. Danielle Groleau, associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry at McGill University and senior researcher at the Lady Davis Medical Institute of the Jewish General Hospital, will be responsible for the research evaluating the intervention.

In conjunction with this new fundraising mission, Maria Guzzo will launch her children's book, "How to train your dreams", on May 16. which she wrote in collaboration with the KWN method. All moneys from her book sales will be donated to KWN.

"As parents of five children, their well-being is our priority. This is why we would like to help improve the lives of as many children as possible who may be affected by mental health issues. We would like to do this through the use of preventative measures, so that they never have to experience the negative repercussions of mental illness," shared Vincenzo and Maria Guzzo.

Dr. Danielle Groleau, Maria Guzzo, Vincenzo Guzzo, and Helen Georgaklis at a press conference at Guzzo Cinemas.

Arts & Entertainment

Outstanding new Broadway play's central character has Asperger's syndrome

By Alexandra Cohen

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time, the best-selling novel turned play, has been seeing immense success on the stage. It began its run on the West End, winning seven Olivier Awards, and then transferred to Broadway in October of 2014. It received six Tony nominations and is sure to receive some love at the award ceremony in June.

The story revolves around a 15-year-old boy named Christopher with Asperger's syndrome who investigates the murder of his neighbor's dog. What begins as a simple murder mystery becomes a story about his adventure into the unknown.

I went to New York City in December, and having read the book, I was eager to see how the words written by Mark Haddon would be brought to life in front of me. I was not at all disappointed. In fact, the play exceeded all of my expectations.

The story is presented almost like a play within a play. Christopher's teacher narrates by reading a play that he wrote about his experiences out loud to the audience. This is similar to the book within a book approach taken by Haddon in the novel, which welcomes us into Christopher's world.

Arriving in the theatre, I was immediately intrigued by the set. The stage is quite literally an empty box, and the walls, ceiling, and floor look like a mathematical grid. The stage is an analogy for Christopher's mind: its inner workings are revealed to be out of the ordinary and complex throughout the play.

Squares of the grid open up to reveal boxes where props are hidden. Christopher writes math equations on the floor, and his writing is projected onto the grid behind him. These make for some awe-inspiring visual effects. A unique stage is the perfect setting for a unique boy to tell his story.

Many have tried to theorize on Christopher's exact diagnosis, but when writing the novel, Haddon was purposefully vague. Following publication of the book, Haddon wrote on his blog that "Curious Incident is not a book about Asperger's… if anything it's a novel about difference, about being an outsider, about seeing the world in a surprising and revealing way."

Both the play and the book are incredibly powerful. They were able to move me to tears, silence me in fascination, and provoke my laughter, all in the course of around two and a half hours. What I particularly love is the fact that this is not a story about a disorder. This is a story about an intelligent, witty, and very original boy who also happens to have a disorder. That message about individuality is something that the world needs to see.

The National Theatre production of
THE CURIOUS INCIDENT OF THE DOG IN THE NIGHT-TIME
On Broadway at the Barrymore Theatre (243 West 47th Street)

Helen Carey, Mercedes Herrero, Jocelyn Bioh, Alex Sharp (kneeling, Richard Hollis, David Manis, Ben Horner in The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time. (Photo credit, Joan Marcus, 2014)

Alexandra Cohen is a first year Health Sciences student at Marianopolis College and an active volunteer in many community organizations.

Créatability Expo: A celebration of special art and artists

By Wendy Singer

Montreal's first ever special needs artisan market presented creative professionals with special needs the opportunity to promote and sell their handmade creations. Arts and crafts on exhibit included photographs by Eli Adams from Vermont, jewelry by Kenza's Kreations, home-made dog food and bowls by Peter Hall School students, pencil drawings by Heidi Vormer, candles and soaps by Light a Dream, and paintings by 10-year-old Kirk Davidson, to name a few.

Organized by the Big Blue Hug and Rekinexion, and sponsored by Inspirations News and Investors Group, Créatability aims to encourage a paradigm shift of how society views what special needs people can achieve and the role they have in our society.

"The vision begins with the artisan market and continues long term in supporting any person with an intellectual, developmental or physical disability in finding and maintaining meaningful employment," shared Jason Goldsmith, Founder of Créatability, and The Big Blue Hug.

There are few words to describe the joyful feeling at Rekinexion, where the event was held on May 8. The over 150 visitors got to know the artists, appreciated their talent and the courage it takes to share personal works and stories, and left with their artwork of choice in hand. Artists connected with one another, bonding in their shared accomplishment and experiences.

"The event surpassed our expectations on so many levels," said Lisa Marcovici of Rekinexion. "We are already excited to plan the next one!"

Read more about Créatability on our blog: The Inspired Blogger: Special needs in Montreal. To view photos of the event, visit the Inspirations Facebook page. For information, contact creatabilityexpo@gmail.com or visit www.creatabilityexpo.com.

Leanna and Zach from Light a Dream at the Créatability Expo.

Learning Associates of Montreal:

Summer Reading Program becomes a full-day summer camp

By Amanda Light Dunbar

From her desk in the administrative office of the Learning Associates of Montreal (LAM), Sharron Gersovitz has seen hundreds of kids pass by her door. They come for a variety of reasons. Some need help with organization, others with verbal expression, others with math, and many come for help with reading.

"A lot of parents call us because they've heard what we can do, just through word of mouth," says Gersovitz. "They might have a neighbour or a friend in the school whose child we have helped. It's amazing how many kids go through school struggling to read, and for parents, it can be a scary thing."

For those families, LAM's Summer Reading Program provides an important booster during a season when school seems eons away and academic skills are easily forgotten.

The Summer Reading Program has been around for many years, but this summer is the first time the program will run as a full-day camp, incorporating both indoor and outdoor activities, and lots of reading, of course.

"Families we've worked with in the past have enjoyed the program, but they've had a hard time scheduling their days around picking up their kids at noon," says Marie-Ève Sauriol, one of the program's coordinators. "We're happy to offer a revamped program that involves educational and fun activities all day long to please both kids and their parents."

Planning for the Summer program begins early. Materials are ordered, from regular camp supplies like glitter glue and soccer balls, to highly specialized tools like therapeutic pencil grips for small, unsteady hands and air-filled plastic seat cushions designed to allow kids to wiggle a little bit, but not too much.

As well, each student wanting to register receives a one-on-one session with reading specialists before they are placed in the program. "We assess students in order to have a deep understanding of their needs," Sauriol explains. "This way we can create an individualized plan that addresses those needs. It allows each student to feel like they're in the right place, and that they can overcome the challenges we set for them, because the challenges are at the right level. If we know their strengths and weakness very specifically, we can help them the most."

One thing LAM is known for besides reading is this commitment to individualized instruction. It's what has kept families coming back for almost 25 years.

For more information on the Summer Reading Program, which runs in both French and English, call (514) 989-9360 or visit www.learnmtl.org.

Montreal Walk Now for Autism Speaks updates

By Wendy Singer

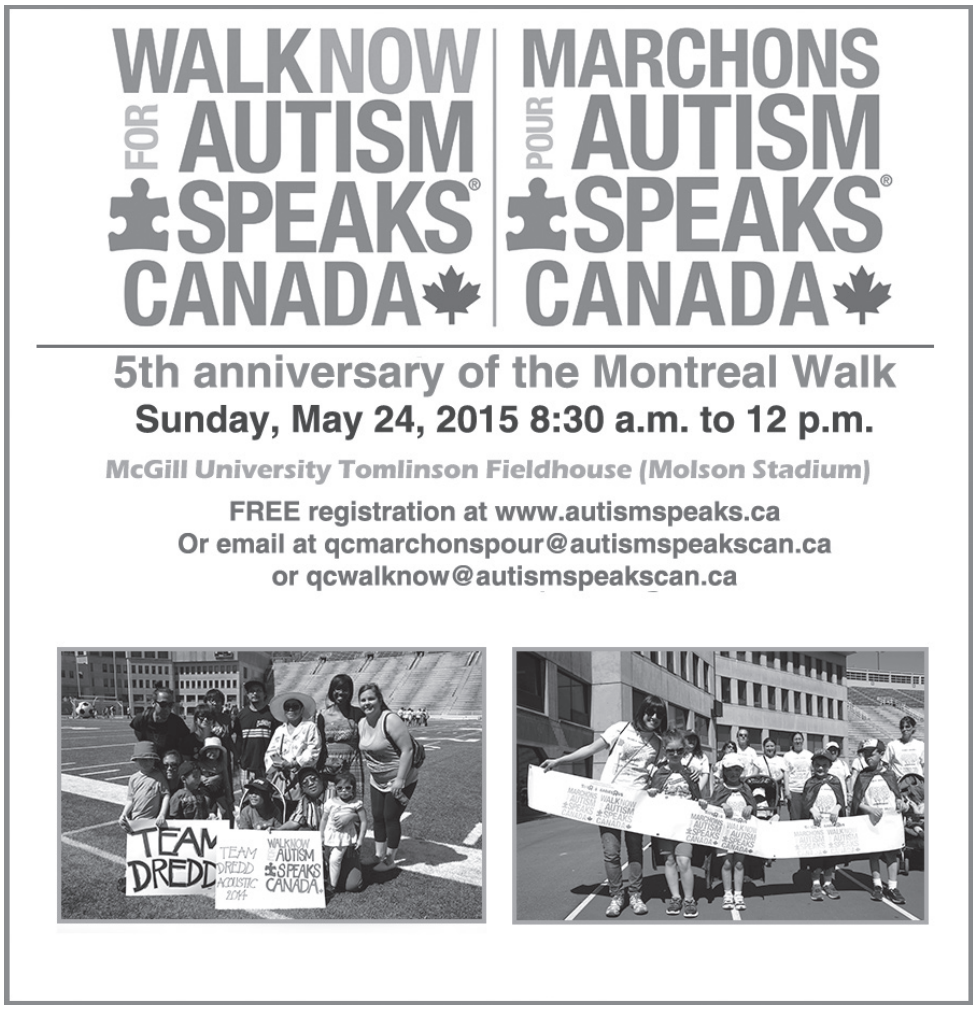
The Montreal Walk Now for Autism Speaks has appointed 16-year-old Jennifer Romano as the local Honorary Walk Ambassador for this year's walk taking place on Sunday, May 24, 2015. A student at École Père-Marquette (Commission scolaire de Montréal), Jennifer is helping to raise autism awareness and vital funds for research and grants. Jennifer and her family have been supportive volunteers for the Montreal Walk Now event since its inception five years ago. Their family team, named Team of Love and Hope, pretty much says it all.

Join our team! I am excited to be heading up Team Inspirations this year. To make a donation or join our team, log onto our team page on the Montreal Walk Now for Autism Speaks Canada website (www.autismspeaks.ca), click on Walk, then head to the Montreal page). We look forward to seeing you there.

Congratulations to Spectrum Productions and The McGill University Health Centre's (MUHC) Autism Spectrum Disorders Program for being two of the three organizations in Quebec to receive Autism Speaks Canada's Family Service Community Grants 2014.

Spectrum Productions received $25,000 for their Employment Opportunity Program while the MUHC was awarded $25,000 for The Autism Family Navigator Toolkit.

Jennifer Romano (back row, second from left) volunteering in 2014 with members of her walk team 'Love and Hope', and volunteer Angelika Moore (standing in the front). (Photo credit, Philip Ross White)



WALK NOW FOR AUTISM SPEAKS® CANADA | MARCHONS POUR AUTISM SPEAKS® CANADA

5th anniversary of the Montreal Walk
Sunday, May 24, 2015 8:30 a.m. to 12 p.m.
McGill University Tomlinson Fieldhouse (Molson Stadium)
FREE registration at www.autismspeaks.ca
Or email at qcmarchonspour@autismspeakscan.ca
or qcwalknow@autismspeakscan.ca

Jay Jones-Doyle is currently the President of Confidence Driven Coaching, the Chief Financial Officer with the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, and worked with the UN's Business and Biodiversity programme. He holds two advanced degrees 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, is an accomplished motivational speaker, a championship-winning junior hockey coach, the proud father of a ten year-old boy, and has cerebral palsy. Find out more at www.confidencedrivencoaching.com.

Putting your self-belief to the test

By Jay Jones-Doyle

I have realized that there are two stages to success, each of which poses its own unique set of challenges. In the first stage you battle yourself, which is incredibly hard as your opponent CHEATS! He/she knows all of your secrets, your deepest fears and insecurities, and can use them to hurt you if allowed. It often takes years of sparring with your reflection before you can consistently defeat the negative self-talk that prevents so many people from realizing their dreams, or even feeling worthy of having them.

For those who emerge victorious from this stage, armed with a genuine sense of self-esteem that is resilient when challenged, the next stage awaits. This stage is where battle-hardened reinforcements are tested against the realities of the world. The main question answered at this stage is: "While I now think that I am worthy, what else do I need to succeed and can I get it?"

Success is, more often than not, a collaborative thing. Few ever achieve success (whatever that may mean to the person) without convincing others along the way that they are worth following and believing in. This aspect of success can be hard, or easy, depending on circumstance and personality. In this, belief in one's self is important - even critical - but it is in the application of that self-belief that defines the overall outcome. This execution is often riskiest when people decide to base a professional undertaking on a particular aspect of them that also underpins their self-esteem (such as a gift for helping people), because failure would involve a need to evaluate both personal and professional factors. But the converse applies as well. If you are able to become professionally successful by leveraging something that you feel makes you special and valuable, you stand to have a very happy career and be one of the lucky few for whom work is not work. This is the risk that I am taking now.

I have just started a personal, professional, and life coaching practice called Confidence Driven Coaching (www.confidencedrivencoaching.com). I have been coaching friends and acquaintances for as long as I can remember, and I have been told over and over that I need to pursue it professionally. I have always taken great pleasure in positively impacting the lives of those around me, and now I am taking the leap to see if I can make this source of pride into a career. While I do have a niche cornered in terms of guiding individuals with disabilities, and their loved ones, I am also fully qualified to coach non-disabled individuals in both personal and professional realms. Join me on this journey, as needed, and thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Jay J Doyle

Strength-Based Parenting: It's all about the attitude

By Despina Vassiliou

Parenting is one of the most challenging jobs out there. A large part of a parent's role is to ensure that our children will develop life skills that will help them adapt to the challenges life will inevitably throw at them. Charlie Appelstein M.S.W., among other credentials, contends that a strength-based approach to parenting can have a positive impact on children, including those with special needs. He argues that there are two major components in a strength-based approach: attitude and action. We need to convey certain attitudes and we do so by taking actions.

The most important attitude a parent can convey is 'I believe in you'. After all, if we as parents don't believe in our children, in all that they can accomplish, who will? Every time we convey through our actions and words that we genuinely believe they can accomplish a task it's a way of providing them with the mental 'vitamins 'which build confidence. Children and adults accomplish more when they feel confident. We do better when we feel better. Focusing on strengths leads us to focus on what a child can do and reframe those areas that we feel that he or she may have yet to master. Changing the vocabulary from can't to can or stubborn to determined has a tremendous impact on the motivation of a child. By focusing on a child's numerous accomplishments and strengths, no matter how small or large, this strengthens and builds up the list of skills a child can use when needed.

Another method to change up the vocabulary is to reframe how 'errors' or 'weaknesses' are perceived. For instance, when a child fails an exam or has problems with reading, instead of focusing on these problems we can reframe them as roadblocks. When confronted with roadblocks as drivers we have to find a way around them. For instance, all too often we hear people refer to children who do not do their homework as lazy. Once branded as lazy, what can a child do? The child then does not feel good and will lack the motivation to do better. If, however, we really look at the situation carefully and reframe a child's inability to do homework as a roadblock, then we can find options of what to do. Some alternate routes for this child may be that he needs help breaking up the tasks into smaller chunks, or organizing the desk to ensure it is clear of distractions, or making a checklist to ensure that all work goes to and from home and school every day. These are all strategies and skills we can teach that can help him accomplish his work.

In summary, by focusing on a child's strengths we build them up. It is our attitudes as well as our actions that will have an important impact on a child's development. When we focus on the strengths, we build a child's self-esteem and confidence. When a child faces a challenge, reframe it as roadblock that can be overcome. The result will be stronger and healthier children.

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

New Frontiers School Board: In the Zone

By Loretta Labrecque

Heritage School in Huntingdon, part of the New Frontiers School Board (NFSB), began implementing the program The Zones of Regulation, a framework and curriculum designed to foster skills in self-regulation, including emotional control, sensory regulation, and executive functions (Kuypers & Winner 2011) with two grade 1 classes in January 2015. Loretta Labrecque, Readaptation Officer (NFSB), works with the classes every two weeks introducing a new concept of the program through lessons, discussions, stories and hands on activities.

Given the fact that students respond so well to technology, it is being used during the lessons to engage the students and reinforce the skills. By connecting the Zones of Regulation App to the Smart Board, students take turns with the different learning activities. In addition, Kahoot.com, a game-based learning tool to create interactive quizzes projected onto the Smart Board, is used. The students connect their iPad to the game and use it as their responding device to answer each question by choosing the appropriate Zone from the four choices on their iPad.

The responses are stored in Kahoot, allowing for the evaluation of the student's level of comprehension of the program and tailor lessons based upon their responses. The excitement in the room soars and the students don't even realize they are learning. They also learn strategies through exploring different tools and sensory activities to help regulate their state of alertness and remain within the 'green Zone'.

The goal of this program is to make students aware of identifying and regulating their Zones and actions, which in turn leads to increased control and problem solving abilities. Besides classifying their emotions into Zones, students are learning about expected and unexpected behaviors and perspective taking skills. They learn that it is okay to be in different zones sometimes but it is our unexpected behaviors that can get us into trouble.

As one student stated: "It's okay to be mad when my brother breaks my toys, but hitting him would be an unexpected behavior." Students are using the language of the program and concepts throughout the day. "Since we started talking about the Zones of Regulation, we feel that the students have a good understanding of the concepts and are labeling their emotions and Zones independently," state the staff. The teachers reinforce the skills through activities, labeling and discussions throughout the day with their students and are working with them on staying in the Green Zone or helping them to get back to the Green Zone using the regulation tools they have learnt.

According to the teachers, the students are very enthusiastic about learning about the Zones of Regulation and are surprised to see how quickly the students grasped the concepts and started using them right away.

Kuypers, L., & Winner, M. (2011). *The zones of regulation: A curriculum designed to foster self-regulation and emotional control.* San Jose, CA: Think Social Pub.

Loretta Labrecque is the re-adaptation officer, working with our students with autism within our 10 elementary schools and two high schools.

Jooay: An App for adapted leisure activities for children

By Bethany Becker

Developing personal interests, interacting with peers, and increasing skills are universal benefits of recreational and social activities. For children and youth with disabilities, there are added benefits of participation, including better coping skills and physical health, and reduced family stress.

“Services that promote functional independence and engagement in activity are most intense in the first five years of a child’s life, and then things start to fall off as children grow older,” says Dr. Annette Majnemer, Director and Associate Dean, School of Physical & Occupational Therapy at McGill University.

Children and youth with disabilities face numerous barriers to participation. Research exists that identifies those barriers and suggest ways to overcome them, but few mechanisms exist for translating that knowledge into action.

Together, Dr. Keiko Shikako-Thomas, Assistant Professor at the School of Physical & Occupational Therapy at McGill University and Dr. Majnemer, have developed Jooay, an App that can be accessed via smartphone or the web, that helps families and clinicians connect children with disabilities to adapted and inclusive leisure activities in their communities.

The idea for the App came about at a Rehabilitation Knowledge Translation Symposium that was held at McGill University and hosted by the School. Developed by Shikako-Thomas, Majnemer and her occupational therapy (OT) colleagues, the Jooay concept gained the interest of developers after it was pitched at the Hacking Health 2014 Hackathon in Montreal. This Montreal-based organization aims to improve healthcare by inviting technology creators and healthcare professionals from across Canada to generate low-cost, innovative concepts that can be rapidly prototyped and refined. The OTs joined forces with the tech team who created the user interface, graphics and design for Jooay.

“It’s an interesting example of integrated Knowledge Translation (KT),” observes Shikako-Thomas. “The idea, which emerged from interviews with youth with cerebral palsy, parents and others, evolved with the participation of public and industry partners, then came back to the university as part of the CHILD LeisureNET research project, and is now returning to the community… quite the complete KT cycle!”

The development of the App was made possible through research funds from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and NeuroDevNet, and the Rick Hansen Foundation. Community partners include the Trevor Williams Foundation and the Montreal Children’s Hospital Foundation.

“We came up with idea for the App when we heard that people didn’t know where they could go for activities such as adaptive yoga, swimming or camps,” says Majnemer. “We’ve been told ‘we’d love to do it [leisure activity] but we have no idea where to go for it’. We thought, ‘that’s an easy fix’.”

Jooay’s success will depend on user engagement - their additions to Jooay’s growing database will help keep programs current and information up-to-date, providing the most relevant resources for families to access leisure. “So many people are engaged and excited, from occupational therapists to technologists, kids, and parents,” Majnemer adds.

“The interactions are really powerful,” says Shikako-Thomas. “It’s awareness and desire for change, coming together with realistic solutions.”

Jooay is now available for free in the App store for iOS and Android. The web-based version is available at jooay.com. For more information on promoting leisure for children with disabilities, to participate on CHILD LeisureNET and find a range of resources, programs ideas, and a community of support visit childhooddisability.ca/leisure.

Bethany Becker is the communications manager for NeuroDevNet, a national Network of Centres of Excellence focusing on brain development.

Lakeshore Super Sonics Soccer without limitations

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

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

When: Summer outdoor season - Saturday mornings from May through August.
Winter indoor season - Saturday mornings from January through April.

Cost: $50 per season.

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

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

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

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

By Daniel Smajovits

Local sledge hockey team scores on and off the ice

Every Saturday morning the Pirates gather at centre ice of Howie Morenz Arena in Park Extension, ready to play the game they love.

However, only a few years ago, these Saturdays seemed like an impossibility.

Despite the overwhelming popularity of hockey in Quebec, the sport of sledge hockey had garnered little interest and even less attention.

“The original program in Quebec did not have enough players to make a junior team,” said Maria Colavita, current team manager. “So, a few years ago, tryouts were held to try and spark some interest.”

While the two original coaches, one an occupational and the other a physical therapist, managed to field a group of players, calling them a team would prove to be a stretch.

In fact, with 11 players ranging in age from six to 16, the team looked more like Gordon Bombay’s District 5 than an organized sledge hockey team.

“We were all different levels, age groups and with different disabilities, but it worked,” said Maria.

Yet, piece-by-piece, player-by-player, the program slowly came together. For the players, their weekly time on the ice has undoubtedly proven to be incredibly beneficial.

“A lot are very limited in what they can do with varying degrees of mobility, but the fact is that being on the ice once a week is tremendous therapy,” said Maria. “We had one player who started off only being able to handle a stick with one hand, now he can use both hands.”

“There is a tremendous social aspect to the time together as well,” she added. “Being on the ice with older players is important for the kids. The older ones stay on ice to help out. These are Paralympians playing with them, they are great role models on and off the ice.”

Even for Maria, little did she know that after struggling to find a sport for her son Jason to play, not only would he fall in love with the game, but her whole family would as well.

Jason shines on the ice, Maria takes care of managerial duties, while her husband Ross and her older son Jonathan serve as assistant coaches.

However, the Pirates’ story doesn’t end there, as after all, at the heart of these athletes is a desire to compete.

Without a proper sledge hockey league in Quebec, games and tournaments are few and far between. Occasionally, they hit the ice against an Ottawa-based team and all the players across Quebec are mixed up for a tournament in Quebec City, but their ultimate goal is competing in the annual Cruiser Cup in Brampton.

In fact, their first Cruiser Cup experience in 2012 doubled as their first organized game.

“It was amazing just to see their faces,” said Maria. “We didn’t win anything, the kids were just wowed to be on the rink, they had no idea what to expect.”

A year later, the Pirates returned and the team skated away with a bronze medal.

With a year more of experience under their belts, this past November, they had silver draped around their necks.

“For some players, this is the one activity they have per week,” added Maria. “One player made the Quebec team, and represented the province in different tournaments. I think some will be invited to team Canada, this is a very promising sport for our region.”

But for now, these players have a golden goal, as the next Cruiser Cup is only eight months – or 24 Saturdays – away.

For more information, please visit www.hockeyluge.ca or e-mail hockeylugejunior@hotmail.com.

Les Pirates de Montréal Sledge Hockey team (Photo courtesy of Hockey Luge Montreal)

Continued from Cover Page

Laval resident Andrew Perez is heading to L.A. for the Special Olympics World Games. At the age of nine, Perez began swimming with Special Olympics Quebec. The more he swam, the more he progressed, and in 2007, he participated in his first Jeux du Québec. That is where he connected with his coach and Club de Natation Laval, where he continues to train six times a week.

Now 25 years old, Perez’ integration into French-language swim clubs and teams was not an easy feat. But with effort from his coaches and team mates, they have made it work. This young man who has autism, is one of three swimmers from Quebec attending the Special Olympics World Games in Los Angeles this summer from July 25 to August 2.

On February 27, his family hosted a spaghetti dinner fundraiser to help finance Andrew’s dream. Funds raised will support his personal trainers, massage therapists, competitions and equipment.

Continued from Cover Page

Two-time Olympic free-style skiing champion and friend to Inspirations Alexandre Bilodeau is the new Ambassador to Special Olympics Québec, a non-profit organization that encourages Quebecers with intellectual disabilities to take part in sport. He joins Annie Pelletier, who has been an Ambassador to the organization for 18 years.

The Special Olympics is very close to Bilodeau’s heart. He has been involved in the organization with his brother Frédéric, who has cerebral palsy, for many years. Bilodeau told Global News that he aspires to increase accessibility of sport to people with intellectual disabilities, and increase the movement by making people aware of what the Special Olympics are. “It is very different from the Paralympic Games but at the same time, these people are real athletes who train very hard and represent Quebec and Canada in national and world competitions,” said Bilodeau.

Unleashing one's inner artist at Galileo Adult Education Centre

By Lisa Trotto

Students with special needs at Galileo Adult Education Centre undergo life's challenges with an open mind and a positive attitude. Their passion for learning, drive for success and joie de vivre are truly an inspiration.

The Social Integration Services (SIS) program at Galileo exposes students to diverse learning practices, including social, personal and work experiences. While self-expression and visual representation are not typical staples in a program of this nature, art class quickly became a favorite amongst students when Anna Persichilli, a Galileo SIS teacher introduced the Artist of the Month project. Studying artists like Van Gogh, Jackson Pollock, and Leonardo Da Vinci while deconstructing their work and connecting to the artists was something students grew to be very interested in.

The Galileo staff began to notice just how deeply the diverse forms of art were positively affecting students. Notably, the work of Chuck Close, an artist they share common ground with, captivated them. Close, prominently recognized for his photorealism, is confined to a wheelchair due to a spinal artery collapse. Witnessing the vivid immense-scale works of art produced by a man who is paralyzed empowered students to create their own masterpiece.

Because of this initiative, Joe Cacchione, vice-principal of Galileo, along with other staff and board members, began piloting Galileo's first ever Special Needs Trip to one of the most famous art capitals: New York City. Cacchione's idea was embraced with open arms by Martina Schiavone, principal of Galileo and Cosmo Della Rocca, director of AEVS at the EMSB.

Fundraising, from bake sales to garage sales, began in order to fund the trip. A Special Needs Comedy Fundraiser, held on February 21 at Buffet Colosseo, included a delicious meal, inspirational speeches, an auction, raffle prizes, dancing, live music by singer Ana Graur, and comedy by Guido Grasso and none other than Galileo's Joe Cacchione!

Students with special needs that were at the event expressed their gratitude to their school community and those who helped attain their goals, realizing that dreams do come true.

SIS students recreated Einstein art work in Chuck Close's style (portraits). (Photo credit, Lu Termini)

In her speech, Schiavone thanked the teachers, staff and students for their constant dedication. She shed light on the importance of building strong collaborative learning communities and the importance of equity for all students. The fundraising paid off, and the $30,000 required for the trip was surpassed.

On March 30, students embarked on a voyage of a lifetime. The city that never sleeps kept students wide-awake through this adventure. Words cannot describe the joy that these students expressed about this unique opportunity. Galileo's resilient team efforts, encouragement for student success and support for learning outside of the classroom has made what was once a dream, a reality for these outstanding students.

I believe Chuck Close said it best, I quote: "Never let anyone define what you are capable of by using parameters that don't apply to you."

Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen

with files from Ilana Spector

LAS VEGAS – There is no question that Las Vegas (www.lasvegastourism.com) ranks as one of the most exciting and entertaining cities in the world.

WHERE TO STAY: Looking for a place to stay? We took the advice of Montrealer Mitch Garber and chose Planet Hollywood Resort and Casino (www.planethollywoodresort.com to make reservations). Garber is the President and CEO of Caesars Acquisition Company (CAC). He oversees the entire operation, which includes their group of hotels and casinos. Planet Hollywood Resort & Casino is one of the newest additions to the Caesars Entertainment family in Las Vegas and is a full partner in Total Rewards™. It has 2,500 beautifully designed guest rooms and suites showcasing some of the best views in town and encompasses more than 100,000 square-feet of gaming, several lounges, 10 restaurants, including Gordon Ramsay BurGR, KOI, Strip House, the award-winning Spice Market Buffet and LA's Pink's Hot Dogs, and the Planet Hollywood Spa by Mandara. The resort is also home to one of pop music's biggest superstars Britney Spears and her show, Britney: Piece of Me. The property is encircled by Miracle Mile Shops with more than 170 specialty stores and restaurants.

Accommodations here are fit for the celebrity A-List, and perfect for Hollywood buffs. Every one of its rooms and suites features one-of-a-kind movie memorabilia set against a backdrop of stylish, modern luxury. If you're a hardcore Hollywood fan, the Panorama Suites will truly feel like heaven on earth. Measuring 1,255 square feet and offering a 180-degree view of the Strip, each Las Vegas room features its own Hollywood theme. Ours featured actress Demi Moore. The floor plan includes a master bedroom with a 36-inch plasma television and a separate living area, a master bathroom with an oversized soaking tub, a separate dining area with refrigerator and wet bar, and a 52-inch plasma television in the living area. An additional bedroom and bathroom with 500 square-feet can be added to any Panorama Suite – something we opted for. Our party of three really appreciated the individual privacy this arrangement facilitated. In fact we could have fit more than double the amount of people comfortably. There were three, count them "three," bathrooms. You can connect two WiFi devices at no charge. There is a fee if you go over that.

Planet Hollywood is fully wheelchair accessible. Stop by the Bell Desk when you arrive at the hotel and they will be happy to set you up with a scooter or wheelchair. The daily rental fee for non-motorized wheelchairs is $20 per day. Motorized scooters are available for $45 per day. Multi-day discounts are available.

Hats off to the hotel for its commitment to special needs. Last October they hosted an impressive fundraiser for Special Olympics Nevada, offering individuals the opportunity to rappel more than 300 feet from the hotel's rooftop in an event called Over the Edge. To participate, individuals had to raise or personally donate a minimum of $1,000 to Special Olympics Nevada.

The Cirque de Soleil's Michael Jackson One has lots of action.

Planet Hollywood Resort and Casino is the ideal place to stay.

Las Vegas has more accessible guest rooms than any other city in the United States. Hotels have rooms with roll-in showers, transfer showers, tubs with built-in seats and tubs with portable seats. It is recommended you talk to the reservation operator about your specific requirements. If you need additional details, ask for the hotel's ADA coordinator. For an overview of room availability, call the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority Reservations Center: Voice/TTY - 1-800-884-2592.

Most hotels have assistive listening devices for hearing-impaired persons available at the showroom or lounge entrance. Wheelchair seating is also available in most restaurants, lounges and showrooms. Call ahead for details.

All hotels have accessible slot machines and many have sit-down table games. Many hotels also have accommodations for wheelchair users to play craps. Gaming personnel are well-trained in assisting vision and hearing-impaired persons to play table games. If you need a sign language interpreter for the gaming schools offered at many of the casinos, just ask in advance. Most bingo rooms have Braille cards and large-print cards. A few larger rooms have electronic bingo, enabling visually impaired players or persons with hand-dexterity problems to play up to 100 cards at once!

All taxi companies in Las Vegas have lift-equipped vans accommodating one wheelchair. Call from your room, use any dedicated taxi phone or ask the doorman at your hotel for an accessible taxi van.

BOOKING A SHOW: My family has become a big fan of Viator (www.viator.com). Their team of travel insiders are obsessed with finding the best things to do everywhere folks travel. We discovered Viator last summer while in Europe and took advantage of its amazing list of options, so when it came to booking a trip to Vegas we turned to them again. Viator made our job of selecting a live show so easy. There were simply too many options and going through their website really helped us narrow down our choice which was the Cirque de Soleil's incredible Michael Jackson ONE (http://www.cirquedusoleil.com/en/shows/michael-jackson-one/show/about.aspx), a sonic, tonic fusion of acrobatics, dance and visuals that takes the audience on an immersive journey through the music and spirit of Michael Jackson. Shows take place at the Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino Friday, Saturday, Monday and Tuesday at 7 p.m. and 9:30 p.m., and Sundays at 4:30 p.m. and 7 p.m. Dark days are Wednesdays and Thursdays. Driven by the late King of Pop's powerful, multi-layered music – heard like never before in a riveting, state-of-the-art surround-sound environment – ONE takes the audience through a series of seamless visual and musical tableaux, at the heart of a world that is in turn majestic, playful, magical and heartwarming. Jackson's spirit is channelled through the vibrant energy of the cast of 63 dancers and performers, underscored by aerial performance, driving acrobatics, and vivid choreographies that use the urban/hip hop idiom as a springboard for exploration. When the day comes for a return trip, we are eager to experience some of the other live shows they offer, helicopter tours, big bus and city tours, monorail tickets, airport transportation in style, Grand Canyon adventures and much more. Log on to http://www.viator.com/Las-Vegas/d684-ttd.

EIFFEL TOWER EXPERIENCE: The Paris Hotel, right next to Planet Hollywood, is also a Caesar's property. Two members of our party had been to Paris, France, and went to the top of the real Eiffel Tower. We just had to do the same in Las Vegas. An icon of the city skyline, the high-altitude Paris Hotel Eiffel Tower Experience attraction is located 46 stories up and is a half scale replica of the world-famous Paris landmark. The observation deck features 360 degree city views and knowledgeable ambassadors point out Las Vegas landmarks. A popular spot for weddings, the Eiffel Tower Experience is especially romantic at night. The views of the bright, colourful lights and the lit water show are unmatched. This attraction is wheelchair accessible. Individuals in wheelchairs who wish to visit the Tower are escorted to the elevators on the Casino Floor and are either taken to the Bridge for pictures or straight to the top. The Tower is open Monday to Friday from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 a.m. and Saturday and Sunday from 9:30 a.m. to 1 a.m. You can call 1-888-266-5687 for more information or log on to http://www.parislasvegas.com/things-to-do/eiffel-tower.

HELICOPTER JUST MAVERICK: Here is an experience we strongly recommend. Maverick Helicopters (www.maverickaviationgroup.com) offer an unforgettable 12 to 15 minute ride, departing from the Las Vegas terminal. A complimentary shuttle provides transportation to and from hotels within five miles of the Strip so that was incredibly convenient for our party. Make sure to bring a camera, and photo ID (for anyone 18 years or older). The cost is $124 per person. Upon arrival you will enjoy a fabulous glass of champagne. Their big draws are trips to the Grand Canyon, something which is at the top of our "to do" list for any future visit.

Guests are treated to the plush interior of Maverick's ECO-Star helicopters, as well as personal narration by highly qualified pilots. The helicopters are equipped with seven leather passenger seats plus one for the pilot. The seating arrangement is determined by the pilot based on the passengers' weights. Maverick's VIP check-in lounges are located on the Strip, only minutes away from the hotels, and at the Henderson Executive Airport, just 15 minutes from the city.

Maverick offers a personalized DVD recording of the flight. Those in wheelchairs can enjoy this experience. To fly and be accommodated, you will need to have a collapsible wheelchair with removable wheels. You must also be accompanied by someone who can assist you with boarding and disembarking the aircraft. Maverick is ADA compliant. Guest in wheelchairs fly with Maverick often. For more information you can call 1-888-261-4414, (702) 261-0007 or log on to www.flymaverick.com.

BODIES AND TITANIC EXHIBITIONS: We strongly recommend you take the time to visit two spectacular exhibitions at the Luxor in Las Vegas: Bodies and the Titanic. Experienced by more than 15 million people worldwide, this Exhibition offers an intimate and informative view into the human body. Using an innovative preservation process, the Exhibition allows visitors to see the human body's inner beauty in educational and awe-inspiring ways. The Exhibition features over 200 actual human bodies and specimens meticulously dissected and respectfully displayed, offering an unprecedented and wholly unique view into the amazing body. Meanwhile, if you loved the 1997 movie Titanic, then the Titanic exhibit at the Luxor will blow you away. Featuring more than 300 artifacts, as well as breathtaking replicas from the famous ship, the Titanic exhibit truly brings history to life. The exhibit features 20 never-before-seen artifacts including gaming chips, passenger papers and even decorative sections from the Titanic's famous Grand Staircase. In addition, there are many personal pieces within the exhibit. Our party was completely blown away by the fact they could mount such a large exhibition indoors. For anyone who has seen the movie, this is a "must," visit. If you have not seen the film, this will prompt you to do so. Hours of operation for both exhibits are daily from 10 a.m. to 10 p.m. at a cost of $32 per person. The last admission is sold at 9 p.m. This venue is wheelchair accessible, with elevators.

WHERE TO DINE: Having previously experienced TAO Restaurant in New York City, our party had only one dining spot in mind for Las Vegas and that was the 40,000 square foot, $20 million design-driven dining and entertainment complex TAO at The Venetian-Resort-Hotel Casino (www.taolasvegas.com). TAO opened in New York City in 2000 and has retained its status as a hot spot, attracting celebrities and sports figures and catapulting the restaurant and lounge to iconic status. TAO Las Vegas, which debuted in 2005, is a multi-faceted and multi-story "Asian City" housing a restaurant, banquet facilities, ultra-lounge, nightclub and a seasonal beach.

Maverick helicopters are wheelchair accessible.

The sprawling TAO Las Vegas is a culinary dream.

The restaurant features a twenty-foot Buddha that "floats" peacefully above an infinity pool complete with Japanese Koi. It is a frequent hot spot for A-list celebrities and culinary connoisseurs.

Corporate Executive Chef Ralph Scamardella showcases a menu incorporating culinary components from China, Japan and Thailand, along with a full sushi bar and perfectly paired cocktails to complement the authentic Asian cuisine. Signature dishes include offerings from sea, sky and land, including Chilean Sea Bass Satay with Wok Roasted Asparagus, a preparation of Peking Duck that consistently receives accolades and Kobe Beef Shabu Shabu along with a full sushi bar. TAO Beach offers an abbreviated version of TAO Asian Bistro's dinner menu throughout the day, as well as a brunch menu that boasts specialties like Sesame Berry Pancakes with tempura banana and mandarin butter, Fortune.

Service starts when the server delivers two china bowls, one empty, and the other filled with chilled edamame. The edamame is tossed with mustard oil, thinly sliced shallots, and black sesame seeds.

Our group considered this to be beyond exceptional, sampling a good portion of items on the menu. We recommend the following: Roasted Shishito Peppers with Yuzu; Edamame; Satay of Chilean Sea Bass, with Edamame Hijiki Salad (shitake mushroom plus seaweed); Spicy Tuna Tartare on Crispy Rice; Chinese Five Spice Short Ribs (beef); Salmon Sashimi, with Avocado and Crispy Onions and Sweet and Spicy Sesame Sauce; Shrimp Tempura; Spicy Tuna; Avocado and Soy Paper Roll; Yellowtail Sashimi, with Jalapeno and Ponzu Sauce; Crispy Snapper in the Sand; Vegetable Fried Brown Rice; Spicy Hoi Yin Eggplant; a Giant Fortune Cookie (white and dark chocolate mousse); and Yuzu Sugar Dusted Doughnuts with a trio of dipping sauces. As for alcohol, consider the TAO-tini, Orchid and Sake flight. Our waiter Yorke convinced us to try the restaurant's three most popular sakes: DY-50; Drunken Snapper; and Demon Slayer. A big shout out to Assistant General Manager Eli Micaiah and his extraordinary team.

At TAO Beach, they offer a range of frozen cocktails, like the signature Par-Tee with Tito's, iced tea and frozen lemonade, in addition to updated classics like the Citrus Blossom Mimosa with Ketel One Citroen, sparkling yuzu sake and lemongrass.

Guests are transported from the City of Sin to the Pacific Rim with TAO's lush velvets and silks, waterfalls and century-old woods and stones. A Monk Bar is decorated with a wall of almost 300 hand carved monks and candles. TAO Beach's outdoor oasis features luxury cabanas, daybeds and a 30-foot bar within its 18,000 square foot space.

Since its opening, TAO Asian Bistro and Nightclub has garnered worldwide acclaim as the hottest restaurant, lounge and nightclub in Las Vegas. TAO Beach's debut in April 2007 increased capacity to over 60,000 square feet of space to host both indoor and outdoor events. The venue consists of seven full service bars, four fully equipped DJ booths, and multiple areas that can be utilized both separately and collectively for corporate parties, product launches, weddings, birthday celebrations, bachelorette/bachelor parties, CD Release Parties, holiday receptions, movie premieres and more.

There is complete wheelchair access at TAO Las Vegas.

For reservations call (702) 388-8588 for special events email sales@taogroup.com. The restaurant, is open Sunday through Thursday from 5 p.m. to midnight and Fridays and Saturdays from 5 p.m. to 1 a.m.

Mike Cohen is the editor of Inspirations. He can be reached at mcohen@inspirationsnews.com. Follow him on Twitter @ mikecohencsl.

Deaf actor Jack Volpe to appear in much anticipated Segal Centre production

By Mike Cohen

While the Segal Centre for the Performing Arts has not yet completed its present season, Artistic and Executive Director Lisa Rubin opened the curtain for the media and the VIP crowd recently for what's in store in 2015-2016.

It has been a great year for the Segal so far on stage, highlighted by blockbusters Les Belles Soeurs and Forever Plaid. Still to come, of course, is Mordecai Richler's landmark coming of age novel The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz, which will be getting the all-star musical treatment in a world premiere musical adaptation from June 7 to 28. Duddy Kravitz has an original score by Alan Menken, the Tony and Oscar-winning composer of Beauty and the Beast, The Little Mermaid and The Little Shop of Horrors. The legendary composer is responsible for some of the most beloved songs and musical scores of our time.

From November 29 to December 20, 2015, the Segal Centre will present British playwright Nina Raine's internationally-acclaimed play Tribes, a powerful look at the meaning of language, love and what it means to be understood. Jack Volpe (Seeing Voices Montreal) makes his professional theatre debut as Billy, the only deaf member of an eccentric, intellectual family. Volpe, who works by day at the Mackay Centre School in NDG, is deaf. He attended the press conference and delivered words of appreciation for getting the role via American Sign Language interpreter.

"When Jack completed his audition, the electricity in the building was palpable," said Rubin. "This show will be done with American Sign Language. We are very excited to see how the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing community can be involved and see what the story can bring to them."

Inspirations Newspaper is proud to be an official sponsor of this production.

Segal subscribers enjoy world-class theatre plus many outstanding benefits, including free indoor parking, up to 30 percent off ticket prices, free ticket exchange and exclusive savings.

Log on to www.segalcentre.org for ticket information,

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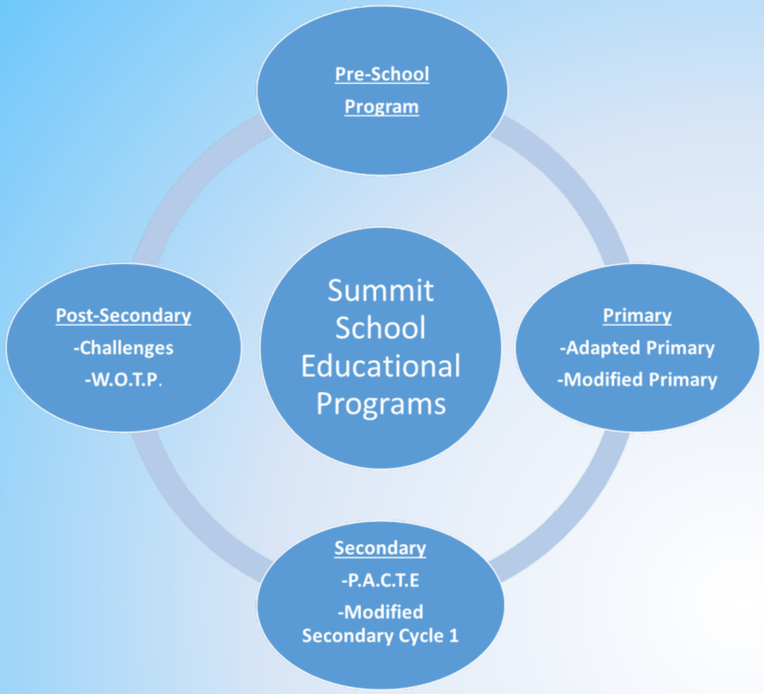

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