

Vol. 13 No. 1

Fall 2020 - Winter 2021 / Automne 2020 - Hiver 2021

# INSPIRATIONS

Celebrating inclusive communities / Célébrons nos communautés inclusives



International fashion icon  
*Simon Chang*  
joins the *Inspirations* team!



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Simon Chang visits with Panagiota Boussios, C.A.R.E. Centre client, and Olivia Quesnel, director of C.A.R.E. Centre on February 12, prior to the pandemic. See p. 6.

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Photos in this ad were taken prior to the pandemic. Santé Publique regulations are now being followed during the COVID-19 pandemic.





Mike Cohen  
Editor



Wendy Singer  
Managing Editor

## Editor and Managing Editor's message

We are delighted to share this very special edition of *Inspirations* with you. Our preparations began during the summer months when we were enjoying time with family and friends under the sunny skies and continued into the colder, darker, more isolated days of autumn. We remain amazed that, even through the pandemic, our community continues to innovate and inspire.

Please allow us to introduce our new partner and edition sponsor, the Simon Chang Foundation for Change, founded by the iconic Canadian fashion designer Simon Chang. In reading through this edition, you will get to know Simon, learn the story behind the creation of this entity with Foundation Vice President Faye Swift, and their vision to better the lives of individuals and families at each stage of the lifespan.

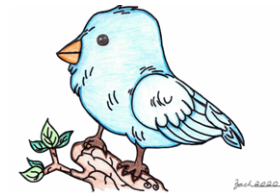
We welcome Simon Chang to the *Inspirations* family and hope you can feel his warmth, concern and strength of vision as you read about him. He has indeed already “inspired” us and we hope will serve as a model for other foundations to join us in our journey towards inclusiveness and sensitivity.

On behalf of our team, we wish you good health and minimal stress.

*Please stay safe!*

### Editor's note

Special needs organizations that we profile in *Inspirations* are all adhering to the COVID-19 protocols. Many of the photographs you will see in this edition were taken prior to the pandemic.



“Bluebird” by Zach Reisman.



“Plum Blossoms”  
by Zach Reisman.

## In this edition

### From the House

- Enabling Accessibility Fund still available during the pandemic ..... p. 4  
Centre stage with Julie Payette, Governor General of Canada..... p. 4

### Simon Chang Foundation for Change partners with *Inspirations*

- A hands-on approach to *Inspirations* and the arc of life ..... p. 6, 7  
The Simon Chang Difference Maker Award:  
All Access Life paves the way for others living with a disability ..... p. 8  
Roadrunner’s Sheldon Bercovitch: Vision and success beyond eyesight..... p. 9  
A Moment in Time: Weighted blanket helps resident at  
Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare..... p. 9

### Teacher of Inspiration

- Sarah Lynch on living both sides: A mother and special needs professional shares  
her voice, wisdom ..... p. 10

### Awesome Parents: New Feature

- A spotlight on some of Montreal’s awesome parents ..... p. 11

### New, innovative resources for autism families

- Autimist.com connects parents and specialists ..... p. 12  
Caden’s Lighthouse:  
A multisensory room where children chill and parents connect ..... p. 13  
Autism House envisions a bright future for people with autism ..... p. 13

### Resources adapting to the needs of the community

- Entourfamille: New clinic offers unique approach to allied health services ..... p. 14  
Friendship Circle introduces new culinary arts program for young adults..... p. 14  
Miriam Intervention Services: Filling gaps, responding to changing needs..... p. 15  
TacTics Resource Services:  
Online play and support group helpful during pandemic ..... p. 15

### From our columnists

- Jennifer Maccarone on learning that tomorrow brings new beginnings..... p. 17  
Steven Atme on Phoenix: A ballad to mark 2020 ..... p. 17  
Nick Katalifos: Polaris program for autistic adults begins ..... p. 19  
Joanne Charron: We’re all in this pandemic together ..... p. 19

### Special ventures and community members

- Zach Designs: A card for all occasions ..... p. 20  
Special care counselling Facebook page connects employers and employees ..... p. 20  
Rabbi Ronnie Cahana  
Reflects on his remarkable journey following life-altering stroke..... p. 25

### From our EMSB specialists, schools and centres

- Heartfulness: Practicing Loving-Kindness meditation ..... p. 26

- Honouring Jordan Smith, carrying her light forward..... p. 26  
Mental Health Tip: Managing quarantine exhaustion ..... p. 28  
EMSB acquires the Centre of Excellence for the Physically, Intellectually and  
Multi-Challenged ..... p. 28  
Scrap the shaming, instead use sleuthing skills to understand  
what’s behind the behaviour ..... p. 30  
Language classes support students at the EMSB ..... p. 30  
Galileo Adult Education Centre:  
Improving students’ mental health during the pandemic ..... p. 31  
Remembering Galileo student Sebu Baghdassarian: Our shining light..... p. 31

### News from our partner school boards

- Adult education in the time of COVID:  
The Place Cartier experience, Lester B. Pearson School Board ..... p. 32  
New Frontiers School Board supports visual learning with new software..... p. 32

### Research

- Collaborative response to childhood adversity in an elementary school:  
A partnership between researchers and school staff ..... p. 33

### Pandemic experiences

- WIAIH, Endeavour joined forces to provide continued learning through summer.... p. 34  
Jooy App promotes participation in leisure online..... p. 34  
Isolation period even more isolating for Deaf, long-term care resident ..... p. 35  
Treiser Maison Shalom adjusts to the new normal..... p. 35

### Arts & Entertainment

- AppleTV+ Review: Actor with autism is a standout in *Little Voice* ..... p. 36  
Movie Review: *You Bet I Dance!* ..... p. 36  
Book Review: Eunice Kennedy Shriver paves way for special needs legislation .... p. 37  
Netflix Review: *Crip Camp* shares world changing impact of Camp Jened ..... p. 37

### Assistive Technology

- A blind guitarist’s view on accessible technology ..... p. 39  
Getting organized with new assistive technology..... p. 39

### Sports

- Autisme Karate builds confidence in kids, teens and adults with special needs..... p. 40

### En français

- Biographie d’André Leclerc, pionnier du tourisme accessible au Québec ..... p. 41  
*Champions*, un documentaire lumineux ..... p. 41

### Inspirational Eats

- Deville Dinerbar adapts with curbside pickup..... p. 42





## Enabling Accessibility Fund still available during the pandemic

By **Kristin McNeill**

More than 6 million Canadians identify as having some form of disability, according to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability. The federal government's Accessible Canada Act sets out to promote inclusion and accessibility and remove some of the barriers that hinder freedom of movement.

One service that falls under this is the Enabling Accessibility Fund. It provides funding for capital improvement projects that "increase accessibility for people with disabilities in Canadian communities and workplaces, creating more opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in community activities, programs and services, or access employment opportunities."

What's interesting about this program is that it has three different levels of funding, which can satisfy an array of eligibility components. The "small projects" component provides funding up to \$100,000 for "small-scale construction, renovation or retrofit projects that increase accessibility

in communities or workplaces." Examples include: installing screen reader devices and hearing induction loop systems; building accessible pathways and ramps; creating a controlled multisensory environment (Snorezen room); and constructing a universally designed office.

For the mid-sized projects, up to \$3 million can be received to "support larger retrofit, renovation or construction projects of facilities or venues that house or will house programs and services geared towards addressing the social and/or labour market integration needs of people with disabilities in a holistic manner."

The third segment of the fund is for "youth innovation" projects for an amount up to \$10,000. This is designed to empower "youth to identify accessibility barriers within their communities and work with local organizations to develop solutions to increase accessibility and safety in community spaces and workplaces." Eligible projects include "installing automatic door openers, constructing raised garden beds in

a community garden, or acquiring specialized wheelchairs to access sandy beaches."

One local example of a successful application was at Mount Royal United Church in the Town of Mount Royal. With help from the office of MP Anthony Housefather, a special committee at the church applied for \$23,914. It received the full amount and was to create a new space for a universally accessible washroom, "with the idea being it would open up our church to more people who are in need of such a washroom," said Genie Morrissey, a member of the committee. The construction costs exceeded projected costs, but the church was able to finish the project on time. "The process was positive, and it is good to know that money exists for this kind of work in our communities," she said.

Visit <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/enabling-accessibility-fund.html> and click on the funding level that you are interested in to learn about the program components and when it will be open to receiving your application.

An accomplished musician, MacDougall observed, "A lot of us are very qualified but we are not being hired because people assume we are not capable. It's hard to prove what you can do when you're not even given the opportunity."

Etmanski became involved as a disability advocate after his daughter was born with Down syndrome. A recipient of the Order of Canada, Etmanski co-founded the Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network and lobbied for the world's first savings plan for people with special needs; the Canadian Registered Disability Savings Plan.

Huot is one of Canada's most decorated Paralympic swimmers. He discussed the disproportionately lower media coverage of the Paralympic Games. Payette commented: "We hope for a time when winning a Paralympic gold is seen as equivalent to an Olympic gold."

The community must bind together in order to create equal opportunities for all abilities, for, as reiterated by Etmanski: "It's a 'do-it-together,' not 'do-it-yourself' project."

In closing, Governor General Payette shared: "A little girl in a wheelchair once asked me if she could ever be an astronaut. I said that disability would not hold her back in space because we don't use our legs. There is always some way of making things happen."

## Center stage with Julie Payette

By **Randy Pinsky**

Disability activists are continually advocating to be included on national agendas, and an important step was made in this direction this summer.

On July 16, the Governor General of Canada, Julie Payette, hosted "The Pandemic and Persons with Disabilities: What Canadians Need to Know." This was part of a conversation series "highlighting exceptional Canadians from diverse areas of interest." For disability activists to have made the cut says quite a lot.

An engineer and the second Canadian woman to go into space, Payette's commitment to constituents of all abilities is evident in her motto *per aspera ad astra* or "through hardship to the stars." As noted on the Governor General site, this alludes to her belief that everyone can "achieve their potential...through determination, co-operation and healthy living."

The panel featured visually impaired musician, Barbara MacDougall; former co-chair of the COVID-19 Disability Advisory Group, Al Etmanski; and Canadian Paralympian, Benoît Huot. So how is Canada doing on the disability front? While the pan-

demic has impacted everyone, the effects have been particularly pronounced for those with special needs. Social distancing is challenging for those who are visually impaired; "You have to be hyper aware of where people are," quipped MacDougall. "It's also tricky as we navigate the world largely through touch – not exactly encouraged now!"

Etmanski spoke about the outbreaks in care facilities and the need for assisted living options. "We need community connectors, bridge-builders and facilitators – these changes are not hard to do [but] require commitment."

One out of every five Canadians 15 years and older have some sort of disability, however disability has not held back these panelists in the least.

MacDougall, for instance, was a 2019 candidate for the Holman Prize "support[ing] the emerging adventurousness and can-do spirit of blind and low-vision people worldwide." Named in honour of James Holman (1786-1857) – the first blind person to circumnavigate the globe – "the prizes will change perceptions about what blind people are capable of doing."



## INSPIRATIONS

Inspirations is produced by the Communications and Marketing Division and the Student Services Department of the **English Montreal School Board** and distributed across the Greater Montreal, Laval-Laurentians and South Shore areas.

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# The Simon Chang Foundation for Change

## A hands-on approach to *Inspirations* and the arc of life

The Simon Chang showroom is a feast for the senses. Each item on display sweeps you into a world of creative wonder, vibrant colours and the exquisite beauty of Chang's designs.

The person behind the design, Simon Chang himself, is a warm, vivacious man with a heart of gold and an innate ability to connect instantaneously with just about anyone. When Chang enters a room, you know he has arrived, and he will leave having put a smile on everyone's face.

A Canadian designer with national exposure, Chang was born in China and moved to Vancouver with his family when he was nine years old. He remembers being interested in fashion from the young age of 10 when, inspired by movies like *West Side Story*, he was constantly making sketches of fashions and movie costumes. He recalls being unique and creative as a child: "I always felt different. Everything I did was born out of a need to express my thoughts. My family didn't really understand my outlook on life, but they were always supportive of me and my aspirations."

It wasn't until he attended the Emily Carr University of Art and Design in Vancouver, majoring in graphic arts and photography, that Chang found a true outlet for his creativity. His archived photos from this time in his life reflect a lifelong passion of observing the stark realities of life with issues like homelessness, being different and helping those in need.

After graduating from Emily Carr at the age of 23, Chang left Vancouver to explore career possibilities in New York City. On the way, he stopped in Montreal and never left! In need of money, he met with a contact at The Hudson's Bay Company who was so impressed with his drive and vision for fashion that a job was created for him. There, Chang learned about the manufacturing and retail markets in the garment industry, so when it came time to begin an independent venture designing his own line at the age of 28, he knew the trade well.

If you were a young adult or an emerging business woman in the 1970s, you probably owned a Simon Chang creation or two or even a whole wardrobe. Chang has a knack for seeing what women need, and at that time, more than ever, they needed to dress for success in the business world.

"I wanted to do a whole collection that was affordable for career women. I saw they needed beautiful, young-looking, versatile mix-and-match pieces," remembers Chang, adding he would discuss fashion trends when he met up with his peers, "Calvin, Ralph, and Donna" on business trips to Hong Kong.

Chang now designs a multitude of products from sunglasses and readers to swimwear, home decor and corporate uniforms. He has even created his own paint line that is sold at Home Hardware. He maintains a hands-on approach to creating and selling his wares. "I have always loved my job. I have perfect attendance in my career," he explains. "In the fashion business, it's about changes, and I have always embraced the challenge of change."



### The Simon Chang Foundation for Change takes a hands-on approach

Since 1986, the Simon Chang Phyllis Levine Foundation has been gifting scholarships to third-year design students in universities across Canada. In 2004, with the help of superstar Celine Dion and the Hudson's Bay Company, Chang designed and funded t-shirts that raised over \$1 million for breast cancer research.

But this philanthropist wants to go deeper, do more, especially now, during the course of the pandemic, by providing hands-on support to people in need and living on the margins.

To answer this call, The Simon Chang Foundation for Change was created in 2018 by Chang and his business consultant, Faye Swift, who also serves as vice president of the Foundation. "I was compelled to help,

to do something different, creative, and that's why we started the Foundation," says Chang. "We can make a difference by doing very personal things."

The Foundation is currently unveiling the Arc of Life Program, which aims to better the lives of individuals and families at each stage of the lifespan. The first stage begins at the Neonatal Intensive Care Unit (NICU) at the Sir Mortimer B. Davis – Jewish General Hospital, where they are creating a glassed-in Simon Chang Parent Conference Room. This room faces the Simon Chang Foundation for Change/Tyler and Sloan Swift-Brennan Wall of Hope which features photos of vibrant children holding pictures of themselves when they were in the NICU.

The Simon Chang Foundation for Change Moment in Time Program services the elderly and infirm at the Donald Berman Maimonides Geriatric Centre and the Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare Centre by granting wishes to residents at both locations. Chang originally hoped to fulfill several wishes monthly, but during the scary and lonely days of the pandemic, they've granted wishes whenever needed (see p. 9 for more details). When health and safety measures allow, the Foundation would also like to create a communications lab on the fifth floor of Maimonides, where residents will have access to computers and WIFI to stay connected with their family and friends.

"This is just the beginning of our work," says Chang. "Faye and I hope to realize my dream of impacting lives all across Canada. Our next stop – Vancouver!"

Chang is also involved in various non-profit organizations including The Depot Community Food Centre, Westhaven Community Centre, the Open Door Homeless Centre, various women's shelters and personal acts of kindness.

### "Simonizing" *Inspirations*

We welcome the Simon Chang Foundation for Change as sponsor for this Fall 2020 / Winter 2021 edition and to our community. We are excited about our partnership, and have been so inspired by Chang's vision that we have created the "Difference Maker" award in his honour (see p. 8).

Prior to the pandemic, Chang and Swift met with English Montreal School Board stu-

By **Wendy Singer**

dents and staff at Pius X Culinary Institute, L.I.N.K.S High School, Galileo and Wagar Adult Education Centres, the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools, John Grant High School and the C.A.R.E. Centre. In each location, staff and students of all abilities gravitate to Chang with ease. In turn, Chang remarked how committed and caring the staff was, and how happy and well-cared for the students seemed to be.

Always seeing the opportunity to "Simonize" environments, Chang commented on the lack of the colour blue at the Mackay Centre School, and envisioned a wall of greenery at the C.A.R.E. Centre. He was impressed with a chair in the woodworking department at John Grant and saw potential for a business venture for them, and he learnt a great deal at Galileo's new multi-sensory room. Chang is looking forward to engaging in hands-on activities in the schools, creating dialogues with students, and inspiring them to be creative and to follow their passions once the pandemic has ended. "Creative expression. It's liberating!" says Chang.

Recognizing that one shoe does not fit all, Chang encourages all to communicate more, even during these challenging times. He says: "Live an authentic life and make everything very special for yourself or those you care for. I don't want to know what you want to be, I want to know what you love to do. Don't get pigeonholed by titles and labels. Show others how capable you are in what you like to do."

At the end of the visit to the Mackay Centre School, Chang shared a dream with me. He envisioned a wheelchair that can access stairs. "It would be a solution for all to navigate cities, travel and have a more accessible life. I think the Mackay Centre children might have the answers as they are the experts. I'm always thinking .... and why not!"

*If you would like to donate to the Simon Chang Foundation for Change and see how you can directly make a difference, contact [admin@simonchanggroup.com](mailto:admin@simonchanggroup.com).*

All photos shown on p. 7 were taken prior to the pandemic.





C.A.R.E. Centre client Nadia Weekes and Simon Chang talk fashion.



Galileo students have fun meeting Simon Chang at the school's new multisensory room reveal event.



Mackay Centre School student Vincenzo creating a structure with Simon Chang.



Evelyne Alfonsi, assistant director general, Education, EMSB, with Simon Chang.



Simon Chang visits students in the classroom at Wagar Adult Education Centre.



L.I.N.K.S High School students cheer with Simon Chang at the EMSB Career Fair.



John Grant High School students strike a pose with Simon Chang.



Martina Schiavone (principal of Galileo), Simon Chang and Vanessa Grimaldi (founder of No Better You Foundation).



Galileo student Emily Royer and Simon Chang explore the school's new multisensory room.



Simon Chang interacts with C.A.R.E. Centre client Alain Chamass.





# Roadrunner Apparel Inc. partners with Simon Chang Foundation to sponsor The Simon Chang Difference Maker Award

## All Acces Life paves the way for others living with a disability

By *Cindy Davis*



**SIMON CHANG FOUNDATION FOR CHANGE**  
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In 2010, Bradley Heaven was just starting the seventh grade at John Rennie High School. Born with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, a condition that makes him non-verbal and confined to a wheelchair, he required a full-time aid to assist him in his studies and day-to-day life. At the time, Dan O'Connor was a 19-year old figuring out his next steps when he first heard about the job posting. At first, O'Connor was apprehensive about applying for the position as he had never worked in the field, but after some encouragement from others, he took the plunge – and the rest is history.

"We clicked on the first day," said O'Connor. "Within a week or two into our journey, I was able to read Brad really well by just a few head gestures. We've basically been attached ever since."

O'Connor accompanied Heaven to high school daily, and when he graduated in 2015, O'Connor was faced with a difficult decision: to pursue his own dream of becoming an occupational therapist, or to continue on as Heaven's aid while he studied social sciences at Dawson. He chose the latter. "It was a huge relief for me," said Heaven through his Tobii 4C eye tracker, which, through a Surface Book 2 tracks his eye movements to produce speech. The Tobii 4C was gifted to Heaven last year by the March of Dimes Canada.

Throughout the years, the pair saw massive changes in technology that would consistently improve Heaven's quality of life, and they were inspired to come up with a way to share their findings with others. They took a website development course,



Dan O'Connor and Bradley Heaven held an outdoor gaming day to test new programs for their YouTube channel. (Photo courtesy of All Access Life)

and created All Access Life, a website that acts as a one-stop shop for the latest trends in accessible technology, apps and information. They also created their own YouTube channel to post product reviews. Their first post, a review of the Xbox adaptive controller, garnered over 1 million views. "It really blew up," said O'Connor. "It kind of skyrocketed us on YouTube."

They have since developed a following by reviewing products regularly and are regarded as trusted voices in their field. Their light-hearted rapport and banter in the videos make them fun to watch and shows a genuine friendship between the two.

O'Connor says that his work with Heaven has been gratifying on many levels.

"We educate people on what products are out there, which can give them a better life. We also realize that there is a stigma attached to disability, so for people to see Brad having fun playing videos, or out about town, does dispel a lot of the myths attached. People sometimes talk to Heaven as though he is a baby or doesn't understand, but in our videos, you get to see that that's not the case.

He has a larger than life personality and enjoys things like everybody else – he just uses the resources to give him a voice and to be able to do certain things."

Their short-term goal is to generate enough income to expand to a studio and hire professional coders and graphic designers who can help with their growth. Long term, the duo would like to open their own headquarters where people could test accessible products before buying them. Meanwhile, they continue to inspire and educate.

Though the pandemic kept the two apart at first, Heaven used the time to learn a program that enables him to draw using his eyes. His first drawing was a picture of himself with O'Connor. During this time, he also received the Lieutenant Governor's Youth Medal and graduated from Dawson College. When some of the restrictions around COVID-19 lifted, the two thought of creative ways to continue posting YouTube videos by setting up outdoor gaming days and activities. Now, as Heaven continues to take university prerequisite courses online, the two look forward to many future projects together.

Heaven and O'Connor are excited and honoured to be the first recipients of the Simon Chang Difference Maker Award. They plan to use the Amazon gift card they will receive courtesy of Roadrunner Apparel Inc. to purchase filming supplies - including a camera, lighting, and backdrops - to improve the quality of their videos. They also plan to run a marathon, with O'Connor running and pushing Heaven in his new adaptive jogging stroller next year and will use any remaining funds to purchase needed supplies. "I will run 41K and Brad will finish the race in his gait trainer."

Simon Chang was moved by All Access Life and their mission, and was inspired to award Heaven and O'Connor with the inaugural Simon Chang Difference Maker Award. "A 'Difference Maker' is someone who recognizes that they have a special talent and feels compelled to share it. Brad and Dan are being acknowledged because they are people who think outside the box," said Chang. "The only true way to understand someone's obstacles in life is to walk in their shoes. Dan has been sharing Brad's shoes for some time now and understands how they fit. A personal need has led them both on an incredible journey of discovery and, in turn, has made them experts in their special field. By sharing their experience and knowledge, together, they are helping others and changing lives. To me, this not only deserves to be recognized but it must be celebrated."

For more information visit [www.allaccesslife.org](http://www.allaccesslife.org).

To nominate a Difference Maker, email [info@inspirationsnews.com](mailto:info@inspirationsnews.com)



Heaven's drawing of the duo that he created while in lockdown. (Photo courtesy of All Access Life)

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You may not know of Sheldon Bercovitch, director of Roadrunner Apparel Inc., but you've probably seen one of Roadrunner's 20 plus internationally recognized private labels and in-house brands like Suko Jeans, Urban Star and Organic Blue at large retail stores like Costco across Canada and the United States. One of Simon Chang's licensee partners, this successful and innovative businessman is making affordable and trendy fashion easily accessible, especially now during the pandemic.

*Inspirations* is delighted to welcome Bercovitch as the sponsor of the inaugural Simon Chang Difference Maker Award. Like Chang, Bercovitch thrives on helping people and is honoured to work with the Simon Chang Foundation for Change to support difference makers Bradley Heaven and Dan O'Connor of All Access Life advance their goals and business plan. (see p. 8 of this edition for the full story).

Bercovitch offers our readers much inspiration. He is legally blind due to retinal artery occlusion, or mini eye strokes of the optic nerve, which occurred in 2004. "It's like looking through plastic," said Bercovitch, who was an avid hockey player and skier prior to the strokes. He has since become a strong swimmer.

## Roadrunner's Sheldon Bercovitch: Vision and success beyond eyesight

By *Wendy Singer*



Sheldon Bercovitch, seen in his office, sponsors the inaugural Simon Chang Difference Maker Award.

This upbeat businessman has reaped much success in the highly visual fashion industry since he bought Roadrunner from his father nine years ago. "I'm one of the most determined and disciplined people you're ever going to meet and always have been. I

became even more driven to succeed when I lost my vision," he said.

Bercovitch uses his sense of smell and touch to guide him with the wares he sells. He has surrounded himself with the right people. "If

you want to run a good company, you need good people around you. I have my faith in other people's hands," he said. "You can do well in any line of business by abiding by the price, product, performance model."

"Sheldon does not let his condition define him nor does it hold him back from doing the things that he is passionate about such as swimming and golf. He is truly an exceptional human being," said Faye Swift, vice-president of the Simon Chang Foundation for Change.

Bercovitch communicates by telephone and in-person meetings. He has never sent an email on his own and is not bogged down by computer technology. He does not drive a car (he has a driver). This, he believes, has simplified his life. He encourages anyone with an impairment or who is unwell to not victimize themselves. "Move forward. You can't take back life; you can only go forward. When you put your head to something, nothing can stop you."

Bercovitch is touched by Chang's Foundation work and sees parallels in their missions. "I spend money on food and helping people, not cars," he shared. He knows how it feels to receive help when you need it the most and is eager to pay it forward.

The Donald Berman Maimonides Geriatric Centre and Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare Centre's Moment in Time Program provides residents, family members and staff an opportunity to nominate a resident to experience a simple wish come true. Wishes can range from a Chinese food dinner to a new pair of shoes, or a visit to a fire station.

The two centres are thrilled to announce the program's new sponsor, designer Simon Chang, who is absolutely thrilled to be hands-on in making a difference. Moving forward, the Program has been renamed the Simon Chang Foundation for Change Moment in Time Program.

Recently, a Moment in Time gifted Eldercare resident Lisa Bercovitch a special blanket weighted at pressure points to alleviate stress. This was especially comforting for Lisa, in her 50s, and welcome during the pandemic as Lisa's parents have not been able to visit her. Now she can snuggle and feel hugged.

With this gift, Lisa's parents, older siblings and caregivers witnessed the significance of the recent sponsorship and treasure from the Simon Chang Foundation Moment in Time Program, originally the brainchild of the Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare Foundation.

## Weighted blanket helps resident at Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare

By *Elaine Cohen*



Lisa Bercovitch enjoys snuggling with her weighted blanket courtesy of the Simon Chang Foundation for Change Moment in Time Program at Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare (Photo, Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare)

"Lisa's severe autism and other debilitating health issues recently necessitated a medical environment," noted Elizabeth "Betsy" Bercovitch, Lisa's stepmother and ardent advocate.

When Betsy first met Lisa, she was living in a group home and had lived in group

home settings for many years. Lisa was admitted to the Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare Centre last August.

Josie Di Benedetto is the coordinator of therapeutic leisure and recreation at the Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare Centre. She regards seeing the elated, positive

reaction of Simon Chang Foundation for Change Moment in Time Program recipients as one of the most gratifying aspects of her job. Di Benedetto, as well as Lisa's stepmother, had already heard of the advantages of a weighted blanket. "The beauty of the project is everyone plays a role. The requests come to me and we get the funding from our Foundation," said Di Benedetto, who presents the wishes to a committee that includes Simon Chang and his Foundation's vice-president Faye Swift. When it comes to granting wishes, the committee also considers the therapeutic and cognitive elements such as what absorbs the individual's interests and what that person looks forward to and plans. "We have arranged for winners to celebrate special occasions, to attend sports, theatre, or other events of whatever it is they follow."

The weighted blanket not only serves Lisa but has benefitted the other residents around her. The staff has discovered that since Lisa is calmer, the residents' sleep is no longer disrupted, and in turn, they too have felt better. "We must always ask ourselves – what can we do to better an individual's life?" says Di Benedetto. It is this mindset and attitude that augment the appreciation that Lisa's stepmother and father have for the comprehensive attention and extensive care Lisa receives.





# Teacher of Inspiration: *Sarah Lynch* By Wendy Singer

## Living both sides: A mother and special needs professional shares her voice, wisdom

Sarah Lynch knew that she was destined to help people with special needs at the young age of five. While her friends were playing soccer or hosting tea parties, she was coercing her brother into “playing school” with her.

Lynch earned her teaching degree 20 years ago at McGill University, graduating with a specialty in special needs and physical education. She is a devoted wife, and mother to Aiden (13), Kian (10), and Annabelle (7), who are the centre of her world.

Her career began at Peter Hall School, working with students with severe to profound disabilities and complex physical and medical needs, and later, various special education classes within the Riverside School Board. She worked with a similar population at the West Montreal Readaptation Centre (CROM) as a specialized teacher, and at the same time while raising a family, offered adapted physical education to referred clients through her own company.

For the past four years, Lynch has been a special education consultant in the Student Services Department at the English Montreal School Board (EMSB). In this role, she works within the board’s special needs network as a case manager supporting the schools, teachers and families by allocating services to students with special needs and making sure their academics are modified as needed. She has also recently become one of three coordinators of the EMSB’s new Centre of Excellence for the Physically, Intellectually and Multi-Challenged, formerly at the Eastern Townships School Board (you can read more about the Centre on p. 28 of this edition).

One would think that Lynch’s 20 years of experience in the special needs field, her tender heart and sensitivity would have prepared her for anything. But when her middle son Kian was diagnosed with Down syndrome at five weeks of age, it was the most difficult experience of her life. “It shattered my world,” she said. “It’s like grief of any kind. It takes lots of time to accept and that’s ok. It’s not because you don’t love your child, but things are very different. You’re not at playgroup, you’re at therapy, you’re not at soccer, you’re at a medical appointment. It’s all very scary,” said Lynch. “But it changes.”

Lynch’s professional experience eventually helped empower her. “Once I was



Back row: Chris LeCouffe and Aiden LeCouffe. Front row: Kian LeCouffe, Sarah Lynch and Annabelle LeCouffe enjoying some family time in their backyard.  
(Photo courtesy of Sarah Lynch)

able to be proactive, we began our search for therapies. When you feel so powerless, therapies or classes or specialists are a way to help. There’s no limit to what you’re going to want to try,” she said.

Her first call was to the West Island Association of the Intellectually Handicapped where she was connected with a special needs mom, Sonia, whose son was 3 years old. In their first conversation, Sonia said, “Congratulations!” Lynch did not get it at the time. “Now I am Sonia,” said Lynch, as she encourages fellow parents to not give up, connect with others, normalize it, talk about it.

Lynch has come a long way from her early years growing up on a hobby farm in Spencerville, Ontario. “The journey has led me to places that are unknown and isolating yet has allowed me to experience overwhelming joy and beauty. Learning to accept life at a different pace has taught me to be gentle on myself during the most challenging moments that can seem unsurmountable,” she shared.

Her perspective as a parent provides her with a unique and powerful voice when working with parents, specialists, teachers and community organizations. She can explain the reality of what a family is going through. She commends all of her colleagues and the Student Services team for

the outstanding work they do with their students and advises: “Don’t be afraid to make mistakes and to connect with the families’ and community agencies. Be compassionate, there’s a lot on these families’ plates. Recognize that each child has the right to learn and grow, even if that path may be different. As a parent, it’s nice to hear what a child is good at and what they can do.”

While stressing the importance of academics, Lynch believes that there is nothing more valuable than knowing that your child is loved by the professionals working with them.

With her Phys. Ed. background, Lynch advises families to keep their children moving so they remain as functional and independent as possible. This is especially important during the pandemic.

Lynch’s family made the most of their time in quarantine, always having an activity planned, be it in the backyard or doing a puzzle indoors. She commends Summit School for the online resources they provided for their students. Mostly, they enjoyed the quiet family time. “Focusing on our kids’ mental health was very important for us,” she added.

When Lynch speaks about Kian and his brother and sister, her face lights up. Kian is thriving at Summit School in spite of feeding and sleeping challenges. He is well-known and loved in his community; the life of the party. In non-pandemic times he plays soccer with the Lakeshore Soccer’s Super Sonics, basketball at Lyndsay Place High School, and is an avid Boston Bruins fan.

“This kid is amazing. He has overcome so many challenges and that has sent us a message. Kian doesn’t get caught up in the stresses. He has an accepting, innocent, uncomplicated view of the world,” said Lynch. “Each day Kian teaches us more than we ever thought possible. We are more patient, compassionate and have reexamined what is truly important in life. I am truly in awe of my son. His courage and determination are humbling.”

To nominate a Caregiver of Inspiration, email [info@inspirationsnews.com](mailto:info@inspirationsnews.com).

## AUTISM HOUSE

The Autism House encourages autonomy and aims to improve the quality of life for autistic adults and adolescents through our programs and services.

### CONTACT US

[www.lamaisondelautisme.ca](http://www.lamaisondelautisme.ca)  
[dylan@lamaisondelautisme.ca](mailto:dylan@lamaisondelautisme.ca)  
514-625-3258





# A spotlight on some of Montreal's awesome parents

## Raising a child with special needs can be a roller-coaster ride of emotions

By **Lorri Benedik**

*My son Zach is an awesome young adult with autism. I remember the first time we applied for a government service for him when he was about five. They mailed us a fill-in-the-blanks form, which had a line requesting "Name of handicapped child." I sat for an hour, pen in hand and a huge lump in my throat, unable to write his name. There have also been countless days of laughter, deep contentment and pride. Meet a few Montreal parents and their remarkable kids.*

### Harold and DJ

In 1992, Harold Akerman and his wife Aviva were expecting their first child. Two weeks shy of her due date, an emergency C-Section was performed. "Our son Daniel Jeffrey (known as DJ) was born with the physical characteristics of Down syndrome (DS), and one week later genetic testing confirmed the diagnosis," Harold said. The years that followed were full of worry and frustration as they navigated the healthcare system, advocating for DJ's care. "What helped us more than any medical intervention was being referred to a couple who had a two-year-old daughter with DS," he continued. "They became our mentors, and we were happy to pay it forward, years later, by mentoring another family."

At eight months old, DJ began having seizures and breathing difficulties, which required frequent hospitalizations. "He got through it all and grew to be a good-natured, loveable child," said Harold. "He can be stubborn, but we are not above bribery; the promise of t-shirts, slinky toys or snacks can be persuasive." DJ, now 28, has two younger sisters, Jessica, 26, and Stephanie, 24.

A few years ago, an opportunity presented itself for DJ to move into a respite home. "We did his transition slowly, and it has worked out well," said Harold. "We visit with him every Sunday." Harold speaks of his son with great affection and shared a phrase that Aviva uses when describing her relationship with DJ. She says, "He is my heart."



Harold Akerman and his son DJ.  
(Photo, Harold Akerman)

### Rosie and Jason

Rosie Saxe is mom to Amanda and Jason. In 1993, two-year-old Jason was diagnosed with autism. "Professionals urged us to invest in specialized therapies designed to fix what was wrong with Jason," Rosie said. "The ultimate objective was for him to appear 'normal' and blend in with neurotypical [non-autistic] children."

Jason is now 29, and Rosie's goals have changed substantially. "Today, we are all about unconditional acceptance and enjoying life to the fullest," she said. "Every day is jam-packed with activities – long walks, parades, visiting Old Montreal and Chinatown." Rosie also organizes tons of get-togethers with Jason's close-knit circle of friends. "Recently, I wanted us to learn something together, so we began taking karate classes. We are both loving it." At home, Rosie and Jason enjoy cooking and trying out new recipes. Eating well and staying active are top priorities for Rosie because of her lifelong struggle with obesity. "Years ago, I lost 100 pounds and have kept it off," she said. "Jason is my best motiva-

tor; I need to live a healthy life so we can continue having fun together for as long as possible."

Two years ago, Rosie's daughter gave birth to baby Jonah. "Jason bonded with his nephew from day one – it's the easiest and most beautiful relationship he's ever had," she said. "They play together and sometimes just act silly, which brings out the joy."



Johnny (Rosie's husband),  
Jason and Rosie Saxe. (Photo, Rosie Saxe)

Despite delayed speech, fine-motor challenges and limited eye contact, a diagnosis did not come early for Vanessa Prochnau's daughter, Brittany. "When she was 17 months old, doctors told us she was experiencing myoclonic seizures of an unknown origin," Vanessa said. "It was incredibly scary because she was having them all the time – even in her sleep." At bedtime, Vanessa would lie down with her arms around Brittany, in her tiny bed, and sometimes wake up there in the morning.

Medications became a delicate balancing act. Some worked for a short time and then had to be changed. "There was a period of two years when Britt was hospitalized almost every month," Vanessa said. "She

### Vanessa and Brittany



Vanessa Prochnau and her three daughters,  
Hannah, Kelsey and Brittany. (Photo, Vanessa Prochnau)

was a puzzle to doctors who were forever ordering tests." At age 12, Brittany had neurosurgery for lesions in the left temporal lobe of her brain.

Brittany just turned 28 – and they finally have a diagnosis: A rare genetic mutation called STXBP1. This is a neurodevelopmental disorder, which also causes memory issues. "My daughter has endured so much but has not lost her sense of humour," said Vanessa. "The other day I asked why she hadn't done something I had asked. Instead of showing her frustration, she said, 'Sorry, Mom, I forgot to remember.'"

Vanessa is also mom to 25-year-old Kelsey and Hannah, 16.

**Do you know an awesome parent(s) that you'd like us to shine the spotlight on?**

**Send your nomination to [info@inspirationsnews.com](mailto:info@inspirationsnews.com).**





# Autimist.com connects parents and specialists, and reveals founder's true self

By *Valentina Basilicata*

May Al Othman has made it her mission to empower autism parents across North America. Amidst a global pandemic and while struggling to pay for private services for her own four-year-old son, this single mom of two launched Autimist.com earlier this year.

"We believe in creating an optimistic community of autism parents," said Al Othman, in explaining how the name of the organization was formed.

This innovative platform connects parents with private autism specialists across Quebec and eventually the rest of Canada. Free to use, this platform will also guide parents through the federal and provincials benefits, the school system and many other questions new autism parents have.

"It allows them to get answers to their questions immediately through live support," explains Al Othman.

Licensed behavioural therapists, speech-language pathologists, nutritionists, occupational therapists and more are listed on the site along with their hourly rates. With just a few clicks, parents can find local services, support, communities as well as therapists, and learn from the experiences of other parents.

Al Othman knows how life-altering an autism diagnosis can be and how hard it is to find the right help for non-neurotypical kids. Just six years ago, before having children, she and her husband left Lebanon and moved to Montreal in search of a better life. "I lived through two wars, countless riots and civil unrest. I've been held at gunpoint," she recounted. "I've had experiences I wouldn't want my kids to go through. So I would have never had a kid in Lebanon. That's the main reason why I came here."

The couple quickly settled into their new environment. They welcomed son Mikael (Mika) in 2015 and daughter Luna in 2018, while Al Othman was working in project management at Bombardier Recreational Products. She is a business major, with a Lean Six Sigma Green Belt Certification. In May 2018, this family's journey took an unexpected detour when medical professionals diagnosed two-year-old Mika with autism.



Under Quebec's rules, children with autism qualify for publicly-funded therapy until the age of five. Yet the waiting lists are long, and some children age out before they make it to the top of the list. Mika has been on that list since he was two; he has yet to receive any government-funded therapy. His mother has been paying out-of-pocket in the meantime, thanks in part to a successful GoFundMe campaign in 2019. She says the cost for therapy can average thousands of dollars a month.



Mika and his mother May Al Othman out for a walk in NDG. (Photos, May Al Othman)

Since experts agree early intervention is key, many parents desperately turn to private therapy, and using telehealth services has slowly grown in popularity over the past few years. The coronavirus pandemic and consequent social distancing measures have spurred a much greater demand. Autimist helps to fill that void.

"When COVID-19 happened, we saw that parents didn't have access to interventions. Some professionals weren't equipped for teletherapy—they didn't have the software; they weren't sure it was secure. That's when we said, 'Let's start with launching the telehealth platform because it's easy to use something off the shelf.' That's why we launched that part of Autimist first."

Eventually, Autimist will expand to allow parents to keep all therapy-related documents online in one convenient, secure record. The same record will be accessible to all therapists working with the child, making it possible for parents and specialists to consistently track progress and goals.

"Given the right tools, parents are more than capable to take charge of how to manage their children's development plan," Al Oth-

man pointed out. "As an early stage social impact startup with the goal of empowering autism families through technology, this is just the first step. We're part of the Concordia University district 3 innovation program, and we're looking to add more features to help parents manage other parts of special needs parenthood in addition to therapy."

Through her work with Autimist, Al Othman started talking to autistic adults and discovered she had many common traits. In a follow-up interview weeks before the publication of this edition of *Inspirations*, she wrote to share that in October 2020, she was diagnosed with autism (Aspergers) herself. "My therapist explained that late-diagnosed females are more common these days since we tend to mask, camouflage it. So today, at 33, I discovered that how I feel, think and behave is not like everyone else, and my photo-realistic visual thinking is apparently not how everyone thinks. So, I'm navigating this new optimistic outlook as well," she said.

She and her partners are also working on a series of informative parenting articles (written with an optimistic spin) geared toward special needs parents.

"There are a lot of parents of kids with special needs who are intellectual, they are positive and want to enjoy life with their kids. They want to be informed and get that information without the shadow of sadness and medical [jargon]."

For more information, visit <https://www.autimist.com>.

*Valentina Basilicata is an emerging fiction writer as well as a professional wordsmith with nearly 20 years of experience as a communications specialist and freelance journalist/editor. She is also the proud mom of two boys.*



May Al Othman with her children Luna and Mika at Omega Park.

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“Welcome to my lighthouse. Thank you for coming,” says 9-year-old Caden Ricci Beneli to every visitor he meets at Caden’s Lighthouse, Montreal’s first public multi-sensory Snoezelen room and adapted gym.

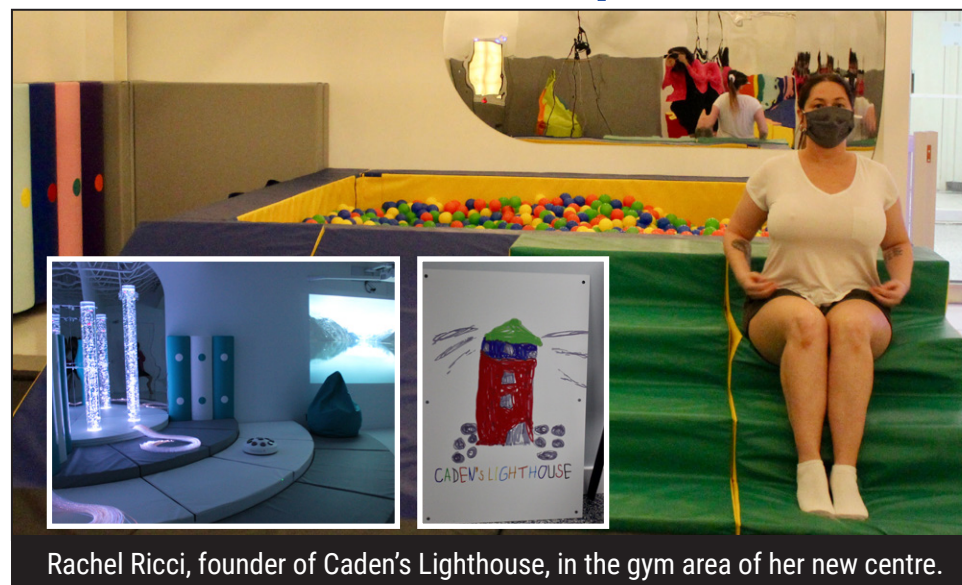
Located in Montreal West, Caden’s Lighthouse opened in March, just weeks before the pandemic forced the city to shut down. This Multi-Sensory Environment (MSE) Snoezelen room provides relaxing spaces that help reduce agitation and anxiety but stimulate reactions and encourage communication. It does so with the use of light, sound, smell, touch and taste, all catering to the preferences of each person. The MSE room is proving helpful to children with challenging behaviours, anxiety, autism, learning disabilities, mental health issues, brain injury, as well as the elderly who experience dementia and Alzheimer’s disease.

Parents spend an hour or two in the room with their children. Teachers and therapists find the space to be an ideal environment to conduct assessments and therapies.

Diagnosed with autism when he was three-and-a-half years old, Caden, now 9, and his family’s first experience in a Snoezelen room at the West Montreal Readaptation Centre (CROM) was positive. “Caden was tired and agitated before going. After, he was paying more attention, he slept well that night where before he was waking up all the time,” said his mother Rachel Ricci, founder of Caden’s Lighthouse.

Caden visited CROM’s room two more times. When his government services ended

## Caden’s Lighthouse: Where children chill and parents connect



Rachel Ricci, founder of Caden’s Lighthouse, in the gym area of her new centre.

at age 6, Ricci and her husband started researching Snoezelen rooms, with an intent to furnish their basement with some equipment. Instead, they decided to open a public multi-sensory room so all families could benefit from it. Ricci is now certified in The Snoezelen MSE Training Program.

Caden’s Lighthouse has three rooms. Upon entry, you are in a clean, colourful gym equipped with a ball pit, hip hop activity box, therapeutic swing and adapted climbing wall, where children can release energy before entering the calming areas. “This

room is totally failure-free. There’s no stress in here,” said Ricci.

Next is the MSE room. As I entered, I noticed a gentle watermelon aroma and felt instantly calmed by the soft white lighting. Bubble tubes, vibrating panels, fibre-optics and image projections all added to the warm ambiance. Made in the United Kingdom, there are no chemicals on any of the equipment or mats.

The third room, coined “The Secret Room,” is a black-light audio-visual room with a

By *Wendy Singer*

tactile panel with lights, textures, a magic carpet with fibre-optics and a crash mat. “Kids can chill, take a nap,” said Ricci.

A full-time mom, Ricci describes her son as a funny, quirky, happy little boy; a teddy bear who loves cuddles, hugs and kisses and is sensitive to people’s feelings. He lives in movies and often brings favourite lines into conversation. Prior to attending Giant Steps School, Ricci took him to over 20 hours of therapy per week. “My whole life became what my son needed,” she said. “He was non-verbal and is now speaking. They are not full sentences and not so clear, but I’m grateful for and happy with that.”

Ricci’s vision for Caden’s Lighthouse is twofold. “My goal is to create a community of autism parents and children where we can be who we are without judgement. Here, I am learning from moms that were in this before me. I have gotten so much advice and a deeper understanding of Caden and his needs. New moms are coming in fresh and craving a community; they come here and exchange ideas.”

Lighthouses guide sailors who are stranded in dark, rough waters. When they see the light, they know they are going to be ok. Caden’s Lighthouse is there to ensure families that they too will find their way past the storm and enjoy the light.

*Caden’s Lighthouse is open to all families by appointment, one at a time in order to meet all COVID-19 safety requirements. For information, visit [cadenslighthouse.com](http://cadenslighthouse.com).*

## Autism House envisions a bright future for people with autism

Autism House is a Montreal-based, non-profit organization that seeks to improve the quality of life of autistic adults, adolescents and their families by increasing their autonomy and independence in order to be participating members of their community. It offers a variety of programs that seek to encourage, develop and reinforce skills that will lead to a happy, productive and meaningful life. In addition to providing services to autistic adults and their parents, the vision of Autism House is to offer housing services and host health care providers under one roof.

As we work toward this goal, we are committed to providing innovative approaches to learning. Our team members, which include Rosemary Maratta, Dylan Hervé, Xavier Hervé, Deanna Casanova, Eric Caisie, Kenza Deschenes-Kherchi, Stephanie

St. Onge, Steven Atme and myself, come from varying backgrounds. Among us are occupational therapists, special education teachers, entrepreneurs, parents and adults with autism. This helps us provide services that are interdisciplinary in nature, incorporating alternative communication strategies, hands-on learning and decades of accumulated experience working with individuals with autism. We are all so enthusiastic to share what we’ve learned and to learn from the individuals and parents who come to Autism House. We have been working tirelessly to create English and French programs for the Fall/Winter 2020-2021 that will be fun, meaningful, helpful and safe as we live in our new COVID-19 reality.

I have only been with Autism House for a few months, but already feel at home. This is largely due to the fantastic team that

By *Michele Matthews*

freely gives their time, is truly collaborative, supportive, fun and devoted to helping make the lives of autistic individuals and their families the best they can be. We invite you to check out what Autism House has to offer. Who knows, it may be magic.

*For information, visit [theautismhouse.ca](http://theautismhouse.ca), call 514-625-3258 or email [dylan@lamaisondelautisme.ca](mailto:dylan@lamaisondelautisme.ca).*

*Michele Matthews is a Special Education teacher at Riverside School Board and a program facilitator at Autism House.*



The Autism House team of Deanna Casanova, Michele Matthews, Rosemary Maratta and Dylan Hervé after their online Fall information session. (Photo, Dylan Hervé)





By *Cindy Davis*

**T**hough the pandemic is making life challenging for many families these days, a new allied health services clinic is opening up in Montreal, aiming to make the lives of its patients, and their families, much easier.

Clinique entourfamille is a multi-disciplinary private clinic that supports children and their families by providing guidance and solutions around developmental, social and academic growth. Located in The Children's Clinic, adjacent to the Montreal Children's Hospital, entourfamille offers services such as child and family counselling, speech therapy, occupational therapy, psychological assessments, sensory processing support, social skills groups and

school-based observations and consultations – with over 100 pediatricians and pediatric specialists under one roof.

Barbara Victor, director of entourfamille, says that the clinic's holistic approach is what makes it unique. "Most of the allied health services clinics tend to be multi-demand but less dimensional – so, for example, you might have an OT clinic together with a speech clinic," she says. "The fact that we have all of these disciplines, together with the medical doctors and specialists all in one place, means that there are opportunities for collaboration that are often difficult to coordinate otherwise." At entourfamille, she says, the hope is that the proximity and close relationships between the services and specialists will make the

process easier for families to navigate. The clinic was originally set to open its physical space last spring before the pandemic hit and has been offering many services online since then. They officially opened their doors to patients on November 1. Parents will have options of in clinic or online appointments for most services. Anyone can apply for services without referral, and the first parental consultation is free. One of the most commonly requested services over the summer has been to provide functional assessments of children who have either been identified by parents or pediatricians as presenting with a special need. The clinic has been very successful in working with families in an online setting. "We're engaging parents in the treatment process, sending materials home, and doing things via Zoom with the children and

their parents together," says Victor. "We're also very interested in working with kids with learning needs and starting to connect to their schools and teachers."

Clinique entourfamille is offering a complementary 45-minute consultation with a behavioural therapist for parents who have any concerns about their child's development or any other family issues to discuss. "The parent consultation program is particularly important at this time because parents have a lot of questions and don't know who to ask. Here you can have access to someone who understands what you're going through," says Victor.

For information, visit [www.entourfamille.ca](http://www.entourfamille.ca) or their Facebook page.

## Friendship Circle launches culinary arts program for young adults

By *Serena Rauch*



Jessica Ipekian-Levitt and Philip Peris enjoy their time at Friendship Circle.  
(Photo, Friendship Circle)

**D**o you know a young adult with a penchant for cooking? Friendship Circle is proud to be launching the DeLamie Culinary Arts Program in partnership with the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) and Agence Ometz.

This vocational option is aligned with the Quebec Ministry of Education's Social

Integration Services (SIS) Program, developed to facilitate each student's optimal functioning. Its components include enhancing skills in problem-solving, psychomotor, personal and social domains, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication. In partnering with the EMSB, Friendship Circle is benefitting from their expertise in vocational education and cur-

riculum development, and the involvement of experienced teachers.

Friendship Circle's director of development Batya Willmott noted, "Our mission has always been about bridging the gap between young adults with special needs and the broader community. We are delighted to be collaborating with our generous and expert partners as they have allowed us to take our mission even further. We also see this as a win for patrons as well as employers who are recognizing the benefits of having a diverse and inclusive workplace."

Willmott praised the merits of this most recent vocational program, which aims to equip young adults with practical skills and certifications for potential employment.

Thanks to an RBC grant, students will benefit from hands-on skills training in professional kitchens and learn how to integrate into the catering industry. Those who particularly distinguish themselves may also have the opportunity to earn a paid internship with executive chef Jeff Finkelstein of Montreal's Hof Kelsten. A committed member of the community, Finkelstein was instrumental in designing and constructing Friendship Circle's new bakery to be launched later this fall. "It's been an extraordinary joy to share my passion for

baking with such an enthusiastic community," said Finkelstein. "I look forward to the delicious creations that we will make together."

This program enables students to earn diplomas in semi-skilled trades recognized by the Quebec Ministry of Education. "We really do see this as a program that empowers students towards greater independence and self-confidence, while also offering employers with extraordinarily dedicated and well-trained employees," affirmed Willmott.

"Friendship Circle is founded upon the idea that within each person is a soul with an inner strength and unique purpose that we have to bring to life," said Josef Paris, executive director. "When we focus on abilities instead of disabilities, individuals with special needs flourish in ways previously unimagined. Our new vocational program will enable individuals with special needs to develop independence, nurture talent, grow in confidence and participate in community life to their fullest."

For information, please visit [www.friendshipcircle.ca/culinaryarts](http://www.friendshipcircle.ca/culinaryarts) or call Chana Paris at 514-735-2255.

– with files from Randy Pinsky







# Miriam Foundation Intervention Services: Filling gaps, responding to changing needs

To respond to the community's growing needs, the Miriam Foundation has amalgamated all of its services under one roof and one brand: Miriam Intervention Services. This new structure brings all of the Foundation's programs (Trampoline Early Intensive Intervention Program, Abili-T Early Intervention Program, ASD Montreal, Azrieli Leisure Programs, Material Tech Educational Resource Library) under one roof.

The Miriam Foundation has been helping people with autism and intellectual disability lead fulfilling lives since 1973, when it was established as a fundraising body to benefit Miriam Home and Services. In order to meet the growing needs of this population and expand their services to include all ages and stages of life, the Foundation created The Gold Learning and Research Centre in 2009.

Over the years, the Centre has serviced thousands of children and has seen their staff increase from three to 70. "The demand for services has never been higher than it is today, with one in 66 children currently being diagnosed with autism," said

Warren Greenstone, president and CEO of the Miriam Foundation. "Miriam Foundation is a very unique private not-for-profit service that attempts to fill the gaps where the public sector cannot meet the demands. Even though the government has put more funds into autism and intellectual disability, and still continues to do so today, there's always going to be a gap."

Miriam Intervention Services moved into its new 22,000 square-foot space located at 5703 Ferrier St. in Mont Royal on March 1, and were physically shut down two weeks later due to the pandemic. But the team did not lose its momentum. "It was depressing, stressful. Our clinicians were on the phone right away speaking to families. We developed an online support platform so we could stay in touch and help our clients support their children," said Greenstone.

Using video conferencing, clinicians observe and direct parents or caregivers with interventions for behaviour and skill acquisition. They guide parents in implementing Verbal Behaviour - Applied Behaviour Analysis (VB-ABA) and Early Start Denver Model (ESDM) techniques.

By *Wendy Singer*

The physical space started to reopen in June, following strict and detailed protocols to meet the province's health, safety and sanitization regulations and was back in full swing at the time of this writing in October.

The Foundation continues to find innovative ways to fundraise despite this challenging time. They held a Corvette raffle on October 29, and an event at the Royalmount Drive-In Theatre on September 2 featuring

Gregory Charles and Spidey the Mentalist and are planning an online silent art auction in December.

The team is planning more programs and activities, especially for their older population, and is looking to offer more flexible service hours to meet their clients' changing needs.

"Our professionals are doing a remarkable job in this challenging and difficult time, and I tip my hat to all of them for their commitment and devotion, and to our Board of Directors for supporting all of the great work that's being done," added Greenstone.

For information, visit [www.miriamfoundation.ca](http://www.miriamfoundation.ca).



Warren Greenstone proudly poses at Miriam Intervention Services' new location. (Photo, Ryan Blau)

## TacTics' online play and support groups especially helpful during pandemic

Kids don't come with instruction manuals. Some new moms and dads may hope for parental instinct to kick in or rely on what they absorbed from behaviour modeled by their own parents, siblings and friends. Others are more proactive in their quest to become better parents.

In the early 1990s, Linda Aber and her husband adopted two children from Russia. Aber had been a nurse for 25 years and knew all about taking care of people but wanted more for her son and daughter. "My objective was to become a nurturing and connective mom and ignite my children's self-esteem and emotional-social health," she said. She sought training and became a professional Family Life Educator specializing in attachment-play, parenting with positivity and anxiety/anger reduction.

In the 25 years since, Aber (TacTics Resource Services) has provided a wealth of therapeutic help and resources for moms

and dads seeking to enhance their parent-child connection.

A month after schools closed due to the pandemic, Aber began receiving a great many requests from concerned moms and dads who felt ill-equipped to cope with their kids' emotions and behaviours. She began immediately to host a free weekly parent group, via Zoom, which quickly grew to 50 participants. "My goal today is to reach more people who can benefit from these sessions," Aber said. "I want parents to know they are not alone."

The group is held every Wednesday from 7 to 8:30 pm and is specifically geared to families of children and adolescents with ADHD, learning challenges, mild autism and anxiety disorders. "I have created a place for parents to gather virtually, share their challenges and gain knowledge and strategies," she said. "We provide hope, support and encouragement for each other."



TacTics' Resource Services Parent Talk YouTube videos.

By *Lorri Benedik*

enjoy games like Bingo and Pictionary, participate in virtual scavenger hunts and share jokes," said Aber. "They go on virtual field trips to zoos, museums and more." Kids are invited to express their concerns and receive support and creative solutions to challenges of the day.

Aber invites guest speakers to meetings who are sought-after specialists. Topics include: sibling rivalry, sleep issues, anxiety and back-to-school challenges.

She has also been holding free weekly Zoom meetings for seven to 11-year-olds. Now that school has resumed, these sessions have evolved into after-school activity groups every Tuesday, from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. "It's a way for kids to meet new friends,

For information, visit [www.lindaaber.com](http://www.lindaaber.com) or call 514-487-3533. To visit TacTics' Parent Talk on YouTube, visit <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCxJTFRteVJB1uqIQVYEFVKA>.

Lorri Benedik has been freelancing for 18 years. She is a generalist and specializes in biography, memoir and personal profile writing. Lorri lives in the suburbs with her husband and son who both have autism.





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# Learning that tomorrow brings new beginnings

By Jennifer Maccarone

Over the past few months, the COVID-19 pandemic has changed our lives and created many challenges to overcome. Whether these challenges were financial, professional, pedagogical, personal or related to our mental health, we had to adapt to them, and we continue to change our daily lives hoping for a return to normalcy soon. These issues are even more important for people living with mental, intellectual or physical disabilities.

As a mother of two children on the autism spectrum, it's been a daily challenge to find our new family routine. From getting the right mask, to understanding what's allowed and what isn't, and now figuring out full-time school at a distance (two different schools no less), and my unstable schedule, we've had our share of anxiety and setbacks. I wish I could tell you that things are great and that we've figured it all out, but every day there seems to be a new challenge. It

hasn't been easy, but through all the stress, the screaming and the tears (mine included), we've learned that we're survivors, and that tomorrow brings new beginnings.

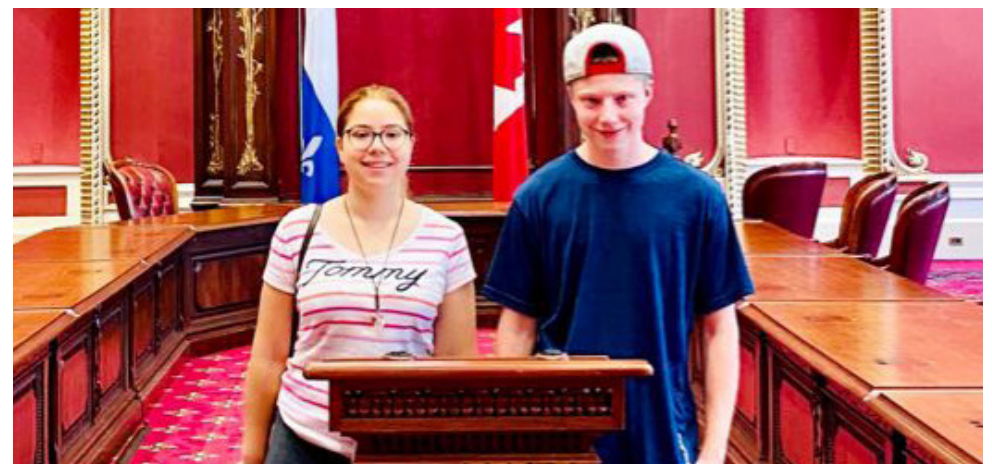
I try to include my kids in my work and advocacy so that they see the big picture when I can't be there to fix the Wifi, or to reassure them that things will get better. I do my best to shield them from my own worries, and there are plenty of them, especially during the pandemic. I worry every day about how they're going to survive school, about how their social and language skills are suffering, about how their mental health is at risk. Like all parents of special needs children, I worry about what happens if I get sick. I worry about the people I represent across the province, and the citizens of my riding. I worry that people living with handicaps or with autism, and their families, are forgotten or ignored as the government makes announcements about deconfinement or how they will deal with the second wave.

Part of this worry evolved into outrage when I learned that the intensive care triage protocol (see link at the end of this article), quietly put in place by François Legault's government, discriminates against people who have a cognitive or intellectual impairment. Now that we are facing the second wave of the coronavirus, if the government doesn't plan for it, we may be confronted with a shortage of beds and/or respirators. When faced with having to choose between two patients, individuals with Down syndrome, autism, or other cognitive and intellectual disabilities are at a disadvantage and may not be selected. Human rights apply to everyone, and you can count on me to ensure that the voice of those who are most vulnerable is heard loud and clear.

As the official opposition critic for people living with a disability or with autism, it's my responsibility to be a spokesperson for our community. As a member of society, and as a parent of special needs children, it is my privilege.

To read the intensive care protocol, visit [https://msss.gouv.qc.ca/professionnels/documents/coronavirus-2019-ncov/1-Protocole\\_national\\_triage\\_aux\\_Soins\\_intensifs-pandemie.pdf](https://msss.gouv.qc.ca/professionnels/documents/coronavirus-2019-ncov/1-Protocole_national_triage_aux_Soins_intensifs-pandemie.pdf)

Jennifer Maccarone is the Quebec Liberal Party MNA for Westmount-Saint-Louis and opposition critic for people living with a disability or with autism.



Jennifer Maccarone's children Bianca and Samuel visit the National Assembly.



# Phoenix: A ballad to mark 2020

By Steven Atme

There are so many words to describe 2020. Every new year is something we look forward to: A beginning of the journey, challenges and goals. Just as things were turning out well, the unexpected occurred.

In addition to COVID-19, one unfortunate event led to another, raising so many questions with no answers. From hearing the news, it feels as though we're reliving history, just in a new generation: Pandemic, racial/disability discrimination and the changing environment.

Affecting all of our lives, people had no idea where to go from there during this uncertain period. Lost and confused, that was me, too. I wasn't in a good place for a few months. Example: The day the provincial government called a state-of-emer-

gency on March 13, 2020 was the same day my friends and I were supposed to have our movie premiere for *The Power of One*.

Second, not seeing family and friends in public, not living my normal routine and a few arising personal situations affected me greatly.

But then, I thought of my favourite mythical creature since childhood, the Phoenix, risen from the ashes to become that beautiful, majestic flaming bird. This is something we can all relate to metaphorically speaking.

From troublesome days to brighter beginnings, there's so much we can give to heal the wounds of others and ourselves through creativity and compassion. Seeing people smile and feel comfort is what everyone needs during these times. Kindness comes – and goes a long way.

Reassure your friends and family: "We're in this together and shall see the other side of the rainbow soon. We can do it."

Feeling all of these emotions inspired me to compose a new piano composition titled "Phoenix: The Ballad of 2020." This brought another idea to mind. I created a short video with photos of this year's events and added my music to accompany them.

After completing the composition, I played the final draft. I began to cry. I cried because of my own agony and that of the world. A melodic ballad, it captured everyone's attention on Facebook with over 2,300 viewers.

We can all be heroes. Again, we can get through this together. A year of change. A year of resolution. A year of reflection. A year of unity. From the ashes, we shall rise like the Phoenix. I welcome

everyone to watch "Phoenix: The Ballad of 2020" on my Facebook page. (<https://www.facebook.com/steven.atme>) and share.

Steven Atme is a pianist and composer, gives private piano lessons and is a public speaker, enlightening on his experience growing up and living with autism. His film *The Power of One* is now available on DVD.



Phoenix Rising, created by Steven Atme.



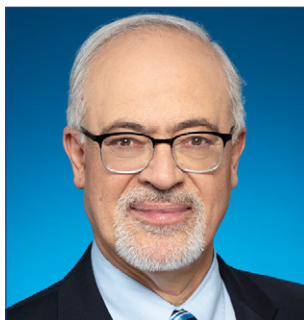


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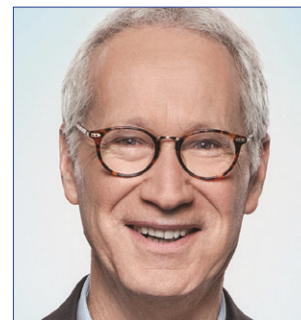
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By **Nick Katalifos**

## Polaris program for autistic adults begins

After a delay due to COVID-19, the Polaris Enterprise education and employment training program for adults with an autism spectrum disorder was finally able to launch at Wagar Adult Education Centre of the English Montreal School Board this school year.

As reported in the Summer 2020 edition of *Inspirations*, this is an industry-based program that was initiated by Giant Steps School and Resource Centre in Montreal in partnership with Wagar, the Transforming Autism Care Consortium, Loblaw (Weston Canada) and the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The first cohort of students has begun their classes and training at Wagar. The “mini-market,” which was installed in the school cafeteria (graciously donated by Maxi of Weston Canada), has been a most critical component of the work-training program during the pandemic. The students utilize it extensively for training purposes before ultimately embarking upon their *stage* opportunities.

The 10 participants of this first cohort are also benefiting from the use of virtual reality technology, allowing them to remotely “walk through” a Maxi store from the comfort of their class, in an effort to familiarize themselves with its layout and products in preparation of their *stages* and, ultimately, employment opportunities. This approach takes into consideration the principles of neurodiversity and can be redeployed by any employer, benefitting all potential employees.

In addition to creating awareness on the business benefits of hiring autistic individuals within Loblaw itself, the Polaris team

launched (earlier in November) an online series to shine a light on other organizations working to accelerate the employment of autistic adults. The nine-part Polaris Enterprise Virtual Leadership Series showcased interviews with top business and community leaders, who discuss what they are presently doing to tap into the diverse talents of neurodiverse candidates. These individuals include major international corporate leaders as well as successful local entrepreneurs, such as José Velasco, head of SAP’s Autism at Work Program; Stephan Marcoux, director general of Pleins Rayons; and Garth Johnson, chief executive officer of Auticon Canada, whose companies hire a wide range of employees with very different skill sets. Dubbed “Virtual Coffee Chat with Paul Karwatsky,” the individual interviews are conducted by Karwatsky, a recent addition to the Giant Steps team who left his CTV news anchor position a few months ago to focus on autism awareness.

Of course, the key focus of the project is to encourage autistic individuals to enter programs that can lead to employment. Therefore, Polaris Enterprise also offers monthly presentations by autistic mentors, who discuss their own real-life experiences – both successes and challenges. Participants in the program hear first hand from individuals who fully understand the realities they face and from a wide variety of experiences – within an extensive range of employment sectors.

For information, visit [polarisenterprise.ca](http://polarisenterprise.ca).

*Nick Katalifos is the principal of Wagar Adult Education Centre, chair of Giant Steps School and Resource Centre, board member of Transforming Autism Care Consortium and special advisor to Inspirations.*



Pierre Quenneville, participant in the Polaris Enterprise program, practicing his skills at the mini-market at Wagar Adult Education Centre. (Photo, Andre Pereira)



## We're all in this pandemic together

By **Joanne Charron**

As have you, I have been living with the effects and consequences of COVID-19. I have also been watching it on TV, reading it in articles and witnessing it in real time and on social media. How could one possibly sum up this pandemic and put it into words? Does everyone have a knot in their stomach like me? What is everyone’s experience given their circumstances? What is everyone feeling? How is everyone coping? Are you okay? Am I okay? What can I do?

In normal times, our life situations tend to divide us into sub categories, “clubs” that we never wanted to be members of, such as special needs, cancer survivors, Alzheimer’s groups, and the list goes on. COVID, however, has united us all in one category, in one global group. Regardless of our realities and circumstances, the commonality we share is fear. The pandemic has forced us to confront our true reality and rethink our lives and our social structure. It has brought us right to our cores, seeping into each and every aspect of our daily lives. It has revealed the strengths and weaknesses of ourselves, our social systems and our society. And it is creating change.

The pandemic has become a window into our lives and the lives of others. It has

allowed us to connect with ourselves and share with others on a profound level. Confronting it has led us back to our true selves and the meaning of life, which is innate in us all. That meaning is to help others in whatever way we can.

COVID-19 has washed away all the noise and clutter in our lives. It has showed us what is truly important and what our priorities are. That less is more, that it’s okay not to be okay and that receiving help is just as important as giving help.

We have good days and we have bad days, and together with fellow members of our global groups we get through another day – whether it be via Zoom calls, social media posts (such as a beautiful picture of a sunset), a phone call or a special delivery.

In these uncertain times one thing is for sure. We can count on one another. And that is how we will continue to cope with, and get through, COVID.

*Joanne Charron is the president of the C.A.R.E. Centre, a recreational and educational day program for adults over the age of 21 with physical disabilities, and special advisor to Inspirations.*



Rainbow creation by Lyne Charlebois, executive director of the West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped. (Photo, Lyne Charlebois)





# Zach Designs has a card for any occasion

By **Randy Pinsky**

**Z**ach Reisman and his mother Lorri Benedik make a great team. Together, they head up Zach Designs, a holiday and greeting card enterprise that showcases Reisman's artwork. The company has been in operation for three years, with Reisman as the president and illustrator, and Benedik the director of marketing, sales and promotion.

In 2017, Mathieu Duguay, president and senior partner of COGIR Real Estate, commissioned Reisman to design 12 original Christmas cards that he would send to each of his 15,000 tenants. This opportunity gave Reisman and Benedik a heap of confidence and the inspiration to start Zach Designs. Reisman created a line of all-occasion drawings to make the company viable year-round, and continues to add new drawings yearly.

Reisman has autism and has always had a knack for sketching and drawing. His extraordinary visual acuity has been obvious for most of his life. At the age of 5, he was finding typos in restaurant menus.

Benedik is a fierce advocate for her son. She has worked diligently to seek out and nurture Reisman's passions. "I used to sit down and play video games with Zach to



Zach Reisman and Lorri Benedik of Zach Designs share their selection of cards. (Photo, Manny Reisman)

see why he enjoys them so much. When I noticed his gift for drawing, I encouraged it. It was something we could do together, face-to-face. We had fun and that encouraged him to draw more," she said, urging parents to go into their child's world and not expect them to go into yours.

From "Plum Blossoms" to "Reindeer on Skates" (two of Reisman's favourites), Reisman's illustrations are delightfully whimsical, colourful, pleasing to the eye. He reaps great satisfaction in completing a piece. "There are some designs that I feel really proud of. I am

proud that I made these cards," he shared. Both partners exhibit Zach Designs at craft fairs, package orders and make deliveries.

A charming and eloquent young man, Reisman loves video games, animated films and spending time with his friends (when not in pandemic times). He has pushed through limiting assumptions all his life with perseverance and strength of spirit. Benedik recalled him returning from elementary school, hurt by an insulting name. While she was ready to jump to his defense, he rationalized, "He just doesn't get me," and moved on.

Reisman struggled in a mainstream high school, but with help from tutors and a few extra months at Place Cartier Adult Centre of the Lester B. Pearson School Board, he graduated. "There was not a dry eye at Zach's convocation," said Benedik, who has always encouraged her son to believe in himself.

He worked at JEM Workshop for 19 months and then, in 2016, completed a 3D Modeling, Animation, Art and Design program at CDI College. "When I [tell customers] I am autistic and graduated from college, it changes the way they think about special needs," said Reisman.

According to Benedik, her son, like any true artist, doubts his work and needs encourage-

ment. Reisman believes that if you are good at something, and have the right people to support you, you will succeed. "Hard work and believing that other people find my drawings cool or creative has paid off in so many ways," he said. "I hope that other people can find something in themselves to work hard at and push through those difficult times and the doubts."

To see Reisman's designs and order cards, visit [www.zachdesigns.ca](http://www.zachdesigns.ca).

A portion of the proceeds of card sales will be donated to Inspirations. Thank you, Zach Designs!



Zach Reisman's drawing "Reindeer on Skates." (Photo courtesy of Zach Designs)

## Special care counselling Facebook group aims to connect employers and employees

By **Avi Tanny**

**I**n 2015, I created a Facebook group called Special Care Counselling Jobs and Opportunities to help connect Special Care Counselling (SCC) students and graduates, like myself, with employers.

Over the last few years, the group has expanded to over 1,000 members and includes students and graduates of several Special Care Counselling programs from Vanier, Lasalle and Dawson Colleges, Cégep du Vieux Montréal, Therapeutic Recreation at Concordia University, Clinique Spectrum's trainings, to name a few, and employers looking to hire SCCs, and workshop promoters. The group is focused in the Montreal area but there

are often employment opportunities in the West Island, and as far away as Nunavik!

As the creator of the group I am so happy to see how it continues to expand. It now features employment in many areas such as working with seniors, individuals with physical disabilities, adults with autism, youth in need, and more. I found a great part-time job working with a child with autism through this Facebook group.

The group has become a great resource for parents and educators, who are looking for information within the special care community. Information about upcoming seminars and workshop are posted on a regular basis.

To join the group, search for *Special Care Counselling jobs and opportunities on Facebook* and send a request to join or click on this link: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/303724346730066>

For more information, email [avitanny@hotmail.com](mailto:avitanny@hotmail.com).

Avi Tanny is a special education technician with the English Montreal School Board.

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## Rabbi Cahana reflects on his remarkable journey following life-altering stroke

By *Cindy Davis*

In 2011, Rabbi Ronnie Cahana was the spiritual leader of Congregation Beth-El Synagogue in the Town of Mount Royal, when he suffered a massive brain stem stroke. For over a month, Cahana was trapped in a locked-in state - fully aware, but unable to use any part of his body except for blinking his eyelids. Though many would consider such a life event as devastating, remarkably, Cahana reflects upon his life since 2011 as a gift.

"It's been a wonderful adventure," he says during a Zoom interview from his bed at the Donald Berman Maimonides Geriatric Centre in Côte Saint Luc, where he has resided for several years since the stroke. "For the first year, it felt as though my skeletal legs were attached by a leather cord in my mind, so I had to get my life force back into the appropriate limbs. And I worked, and I worked. It was so fascinating. My arms - I can remember everyday how glorious it was to bring my mental image into my larger body."

Through years of rehabilitation and dedication, Cahana has regained some mobility in his arms and legs and is able to speak and eat on his own. "I'm an impatient patient," he muses. "I was told that I would never speak on my own, that my vocal cords were fully paralyzed. They told me I would never eat normal food. Now, I can even feed myself at times. But if I don't keep working, my body regresses."

During the first wave of the pandemic, Cahana was displaced from his room and sent to another wing of the hospital. He suffered some setbacks but says he has

never lost hope and truly appreciates the small things in life that most people take for granted. "I see the wholeness of the soul with the body, and the everyday miracle to live completely."

Despite his challenges, he has continued to teach bi-weekly classes on Jewish learning from his residence - in person before the pandemic and now via Zoom. He also has an active blog, writes poetry and is working on several projects with his children.

Cahana draws strength from his family, his voice strengthening and his eyes lighting up when he speaks of them, particularly, his wife. He says that though they must live apart because of the circumstances, they share an unbreakable bond. "My wife and I usually have the same dreams, so we live together in the nighttime," he says poetically. His daughter, Kitra, is an award-winning photojournalist who has created photo essays of her father's experiences and gave a powerful TedTalk in 2014 on the subject, which has been viewed over a million times.

Though he has faced tremendous adversity, Cahana continues to inspire others. When asked his advice to others facing challenges in their own lives, he replies, "you can't function without self-love, otherwise you're only reacting rather than creating."

To visit Rabbi Ronnie Cahana's blog, visit <https://rabbicahana.wordpress.com>.

To watch Kitra Cahana's TED talk visit <https://www.ted.com> and search for Kitra Cahana.



Rabbi Ronnie Cahana is soothed by his late mother, well-known artist Alice Lok Cahana. (Photo, Kitra Cahana)





# Heartfulness: Practicing Loving-Kindness meditation

By **Danika Swanson**



Our first two Mindfulness columns focused on mindful bodies, mindful breathing and mindful listening. In this third column, we will explore Heartfulness, a mindfulness practice that involves sending kind thoughts to others.

Heartfulness, is based on Loving-Kindness Meditation. While it has its roots in Buddhist tradition, there is a lot of research that shows that this practice can increase well-being and positive emotions, cultivate compassion and empathy for ourselves and others, and help us feel more connected to the people around us – both loved ones and strangers. Something we could all use more of, now and always. In addition, research suggests that when people practice regularly, they start automatically reacting more positively to others, enhancing the quality of their social interactions and relationships.

Traditionally, the Loving-Kindness practice involves a simple repetition of three or four phrases wishing for someone to be

happy, healthy and strong, and filled with ease/peace/joy. During these times, a wish for safety could be added as well. While the full practice includes directing these wishes to a series of different people starting with yourself and then expanding your circle outwards (to a loved one, then to someone you feel neutral about, then towards someone you might be having difficulty with, and finally to all beings everywhere), here we are going to keep it simple and focus on sending kind thoughts to someone we love.

You can use whichever words and phrasing feel most comfortable or natural for you, for example, “May you be...” “I hope you will be...” “I wish for you to be...” Note, if you say these slowly and include a mindful breath, it takes about 20 seconds, presenting a nice alternative to singing “Happy Birthday” while washing your hands and an easy way to integrate practice into your daily life!

## Practice:

- ♥ Get into your mindful body. Place your hand(s) on your chest, your heart centre.
- ♥ Close your eyes (or keep your gaze soft) and bring to mind someone you see reg-

ularly who makes you happy when you see them. It can be someone you live with, someone at school, a teacher or maybe even a pet!

- ♥ Let your heart fill with kindness and repeat the following phrases, either out loud or silently in your mind.

- \* May you be healthy and strong.
- \* May you be happy.
- \* May you be safe and sound.
- \* May you be peaceful.

- ♥ Take a few moments and let those kind thoughts flow from your heart to theirs.

When you're ready, open your eyes and notice how it felt to send kind thoughts to that person.

Here are some resources to check out:  
*Sending Kind Thoughts | Loving-Kindness Meditation, from Greater Good Science Center: (1:46)* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ccvFBGhBKg4>.

*GoZen! Loving Kindness Meditation:*  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NC2aHvob0eo> (4:54).

*Mindfulness Class for Kids! Ep. 5 by Mindful Schools, Sending Kind Thoughts (15:13)* <https://vimeo.com/402229991>.

*Danika Swanson is the consultant for the Spiritual and Community Animation Service at the English Montreal School Board and was trained by Mindful Schools to teach mindfulness to students from K-12.*



## Honouring *Jordan Smith*, carrying her light forward

By **Tania Piperni**



Jordan Smith is remembered fondly by her colleagues.  
 (Photo, Stephanie Tudin Photography)

The autism community lost a special educator on April 6, 2020 when Jordan Smith passed away suddenly. Jordan was the newest autism spectrum disorders consultant at the English Montreal School Board (EMSB). She had previously been a classroom teacher for students with ASD at both the elementary and high school levels at the EMSB. Prior to moving to Montreal, she began her career as a behaviour interventionist in Ottawa.

Her passion shone through when working with her students. Always in search of activities to best meet their individual needs, she created materials for them on her own time, advocated for more resources and more support for them. Jordan was dedicated to helping students as well as their families, compassionate about their individual struggles. In August 2019, when Jordan joined the EMSB Student Services Department, she was further committed to addressing student needs; driven to making a difference, to learn more, and to make changes that would positively impact the lives she touched.

Her compassion continued to come to light during her last days as she volunteered to support the needy during the COVID-19 crisis. Using her famous bicycle that brought her everywhere, she delivered food to the elderly who were isolated in their homes; showing how she always strived to help the most vulnerable.

In her 30 short years, Jordan made an impact on those around her. She leaves behind family, friends and colleagues who are missing her terribly; missing her smile, her quiet nature, her passion and her ambition. The EMSB staff as well as the autism community are united in mourning this loss, however she would not want us to dwell in our sorrow. To honour Jordan, we must each be compelled to strive for the same things she did, push for the rights of the students, and help them reach their maximum potential to become contributors to society. This is how we can carry her light forward and commemorate her life.

*Tania Piperni is an autism spectrum disorders consultant with the English Montreal School Board.*





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## Mental Health Tip:

### Managing quarantine exhaustion through self-care, problem solving and coping strategies

**A**midst the new reality we are all living with during this global pandemic, our children are attending school with new rules and protocols in place. Some of our children are handling the pandemic well while others show signs of stress resulting from new fears. We are all under a new stress that is unpredictable, long-lasting, and has impacted all aspects of our social, academic and work lives. Each of us has been affected to some degree both emotionally and/or physically. Due to the prolonged nature of the pandemic, we now appear to be experiencing quarantine exhaustion.

So how do we help ourselves and our children to move forward?

1. **Self-care.** Reaffirm your own safety and security first. On an airplane, the parent must put on their oxygen mask first before they help their children. We must do the same for our mental health. If parents do not take the time to take care of themselves, we will not have the capacity to take care of others. Make time to do things that can replenish you, like taking a bubble bath, a walk, or connecting with other parents. Remember, you are modeling for your children. Look for the positives. Help children identify what others are doing to make things better and encourage them to do the same. The “ça va bien aller” rainbows gave children something to do during the isolation period that empowered them to cheer up others. Look for examples on the news or social media.
2. **Update routines, rituals and structure.** Having clear expectations of what to do and when helps diminish the stress of the unknown. Our routines and rituals now have new elements, such as more handwashing.
3. **Manage concerns.** When your child demonstrates specific concerns (e.g., difficulty completing school work) take the time to problem-solve and help them break down the task into smaller, more manageable bits. Create lists, a schedule with time limits/deadlines for the smaller tasks, and rewards for completing the task. If they are concerned about COVID-19, discuss all of the protocols in place at school, in the community and at home

By *Despina Vassiliou and Janet Perlis*

(e.g., frequent handwashing, wearing masks, social distancing). You may have to explain why these rules are in place.

4. **Monitor your child's reactions.** Have you noticed any changes in mood, eating or sleeping habits? Are they more irritable? Has your child been stressed due to COVID-19? Try to take note of what changes you are noticing and since when. If you notice significant changes, it may be time to seek help from your child's doctor.
5. **Build coping strategies.** Work with your children to identify what helps calm them and what can reduce their stress. Help them identify the signs in their body that signal something that is bothering them (e.g., tension in arms, butterflies in the tummy). Remind them about the strategies they have used in the past that have worked and help them to apply them to related things that are bothering them today.

No matter how we are impacted by the pandemic, there is one outcome that we cannot forget: It provides a unique opportunity to build resilience. By following the suggested strategies, we can help ourselves and our children bounce back. As with every crisis – growth can result for ourselves and our children.

*Despina Vassiliou, Ph.D., and Janet Perlis, M.Ed. are psychologists at the English Montreal School Board.*



## EMSB acquires a second Centre of Excellence



By *Claudia De Luca, Sarah Lynch and Sophia Orfanos*

**T**he English Montreal School Board (EMSB) is happy to announce its recent acquisition of the Centre of Excellence for the Physically, Intellectually and Multi-Challenged (COE PIM). It is a provincial service funded and mandated by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement Supérieur (MEES) and is part of the Inclusive Education Services (IES).

The COE PIM is the second centre to operate out of the EMSB (it also runs the Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development) and was previously located at the Eastern Townships School Board. Its transfer to the EMSB marks the first time that a Centre of Excellence has been relocated.

The mission of COE PIM is to share best practice research with all English school boards and personnel in the education of students with physical and intellectual disabilities. The Centre offers guidance and expertise for the organization of programs and adapted teaching to students with special learning needs. These services are offered to school personnel who work with students identified with physical, intellectual or multiple diagnoses.

The philosophy and mandate of the COE PIM is to recognize the potential in all individuals regardless of their disabili-

ties, to foster growth and self-fulfillment by providing opportunities to increase self-esteem, foster independence and engage in positive social relationships at home, school and within the community.

A new website (<https://coepim.ca/>) offers tools and resources to better support students including online resources and literature, professional development, government programs and funding, as well as a section on the transition to adulthood. Their main focus during the COVID-19 pandemic is on online learning and how to better support students' varying levels of learning in an online classroom.

The team is excited about this new mandate and looks forward to providing support to teachers, consultants and professionals through learning networks, workshops as well as individual correspondence.

*Claudia De Luca is an occupational therapist, Sarah Lynch is a special education consultant, and Sophia Orfanos is a speech and language pathologist at the English Montreal School Board. Together, they form the multidisciplinary team that coordinates the COE PIM, which is located at the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools campus in NDG.*

Visit the COE PIM website at <https://coepim.ca/>



Photo by Alex Jackman on Unsplash.





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# Scrap the shaming, instead use sleuthing skills to understand what's behind the behaviour

By *Stephanie Paquette*

Parenting is exhausting, colourful, rewarding and constant. It teaches us inexplicable truths about ourselves and functions as a compass, guiding us to the parts of ourselves that need to be worked on and cared for. As parents, we can easily slip into patterns of irritation that are seemingly motivated by our children's misbehaviour. Fatigue and exasperation can set in and manifest into shaming statements that condemn our children. Instead, we should be trying to understand their behaviour through what they are communicating to us.

When we shame a child, we neglect to differentiate the person from the behaviour that they are exhibiting. We use statements that resemble put-downs, rather than accurately identifying the need behind the behaviour and addressing it. We may use statements such as "You should know better" instead of "What did you learn from this mistake?" Or, "Stop acting like a baby" instead of "It's ok to feel sad and cry. I'll be over here if you need my



help." Shaming communicates our disapproval in ways that can be embarrassing or humiliating, and prevents us from guiding our children towards more appropriate and desirable behaviours. Depending upon parental shaming patterns, children may carry this shame with them and retaliate with aggressive or self-destructive behaviours. Like crying for sadness and shouting

for anger, most emotions have a physical expression which allows them to dissipate. Shame doesn't. This is why the effects of shame last well into the long term.

A child can also feel shamed when they hear their caregiver discussing with others difficult situations in which they were involved. For example, last weekend I was discussing

my son's challenging bedtime behaviours with another adult. I mentioned some of his behaviours that I find unfavourable and the impact that this has been having on the family. Not long after the conversation, he started throwing sand and whining. When I asked him how he was feeling he said: "Don't talk about me." Realizing he had heard my conversation, I knelt down to his level, apologized for speaking negatively about him, expressed that I loved him very much and that I would not speak about him in this way again. My intervention quickly resolved the situation. My ability to admit fault, apologize for my actions, make him feel loved and offer an alternative for the future quickly repaired my error.

As parents, we are important role models in our children's lives. Our choice of words can devastate our children, impeding their emotional growth – and they can also have deep healing powers. Empowering our children's resilience and favourably contributing to their emotional health can be achieved when we consciously choose our words and when we guide them with empathy.

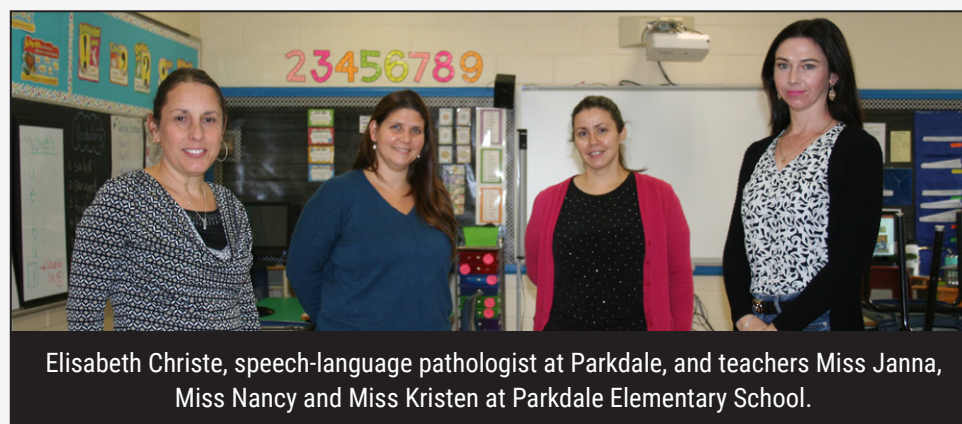
*Stephanie Paquette is a behaviour management specialist with the Student Services Department at the English Montreal School Board.*

## Language classes support students at the EMSB

Language development happens so naturally for most children that we may take for granted the subtle complexities of this seemingly simple task. When language learning difficulties in children persist beyond the age of 5, parents may hear the label "Developmental Language Disorder" or DLD. School-aged children with DLD may encounter certain learning challenges and face other obstacles during the course of their day, due to their weaker language skills.

To support children with severe DLD, the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) currently welcomes children in one of five language classes at the elementary level (three at Parkdale in Ville Saint-Laurent and two at Edward Murphy in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve). Children who attend one of these language classes benefit from being able to attend a regular school while also receiving small-group attention. Parents report that their children are happier, and often feel like they have found a place where they can thrive.

Children in these classes are supported not only in their academics but also their



Elisabeth Christe, speech-language pathologist at Parkdale, and teachers Miss Janna, Miss Nancy and Miss Kristen at Parkdale Elementary School.

overall communication needs. Specialized teachers engage the children in learning activities that are adapted to their language development, where visuals used in the classroom are a large component of the scaffolding provided.

Teachers and students use both low- and high-tech devices daily to help increase the students' comprehension in all subject matters. The regular use of charts, graphs or visual organizers, as well as iPads and an interactive whiteboard are all educational

tools that support their learning. As more and more technology makes its way into the classroom, it allows children new opportunities to showcase some of their strengths. With this, the children are more engaged in their learning and gain more self-esteem.

The classes are also supported by a speech-language pathologist, as well as other professionals from the EMSB's Student Services department. As a team, their main goal is to support the teachers, students and their families. The increased opportunity for the

teachers and professionals to interact with the students, in small groups or even one-on-one, fosters a greater amount of personalized attention throughout the day.

Although their language disabilities will always be present to some degree, with the right support children with DLD are able to grow up to be happy and productive adults. Much of that specialized support starts in places like the language classes, setting kids off on the right path. Increasing the awareness of DLD, and its prevalence in schools, will help to demystify this invisible disability, and provide children with language learning difficulties the best opportunities for more success throughout their lifetime.

*To learn more about DLD, including links to websites and other resources, visit [coesld.ca](http://coesld.ca) or [radld.org](http://radld.org). Check out their most recent Communications Disorders newsletter (<http://coesld.ca/Newsletters/2020-Spring.pdf>) while visiting.*

*Elisabeth Christe is a speech-language pathologist at the English Montreal School Board.*





The return to school amidst a global pandemic was riddled with unanswered questions, uncertainties and anxiety. At Galileo Adult Education Centre in Montreal North, our special needs learners quickly adapted to learning in a virtual classroom setting when classes were shut down last March. Now that our doors are open again, nearly 150 Social Integration Services (SIS) students are doing what they love – learning and growing together.

Our Sociovocational Integration Services (SVIS) program has welcomed back 42 students who are eager to get back into the workforce. They will be able to continue learning valuable work skills through their work placement stages at our partner companies. Fortunately, our partners provide a safe environment for our students after students.

SIS and SVIS students have been doing an incredible job following the new school rules. Mask and visor-wearing along with daily temperature checks, regular hand washing, and sanitizing have become part of our routine. Classes have been modified and the SIS students remain in their classroom “bubbles.” Our educators have been doing a fantastic job ensuring that students are benefiting from our diversified program. Teachers are connecting with students who remain at home due to underlying health conditions to ensure total inclusion of our entire student body.

## Galileo provides tips to improve students’ mental health during the pandemic



SIS student Emilie reads a graphic novel during English Language Arts class. (Photo, Nancy Ruscitto)

We are finding innovative ways to build social skills among peers. Instead of having two classes gathering in the same space to socialize, teachers can now allow this to happen virtually using Microsoft Teams. And we’ve begun a weekly virtual bingo tournament where students from every class can interact and participate online. This is our way of staying safe, still staying connected and still having fun!

At the moment, the promotion of positive mental health is our main goal. A focus has been placed on activities that support mental health and diminish anxiety. Students have been engaged in activities that lift their spirits, such as artistic expression, reading for pleasure, theatre, soap making, culinary arts, video production and physical activity, outdoors when weather permits.

The practice of yoga has proven to be beneficial for the mind, body and soul. Meditation, guided breathing exercises and yoga have greatly assisted our students.

Fear is still prominent – which is completely normal during a time of uncertainty. Students express their worries for their elderly parents, their friends who have not returned to school and especially about the second wave and the prospect of schools shutting down again. When anxieties take over, we encourage our students to take it day-by-day and always focus on positive emotions. The power of yoga and meditation have proven to bring students’ drifting minds back into focus and have allowed them to better understand their anxiety. While we may not always have complete control, we can

By **Lisa Trotto and Felicia Nardolillo**

always infuse optimism into our surroundings – and that is exactly what the return to Galileo has provided our students.

*Lisa Trotto is an SIS teacher and Felicia Nardolillo is an SIS facilitator at Galileo Adult Education Centre.*



Lisa Trotto's SIS students open their cookie kits for a cookie decorating workshop led by master cookie decorator Amanda Trotto. (Photo, Amanda Trotto)

## Remembering Sebu Baghdassarian: Our shining light

By **Lisa Trotto and Caroline Jelovcic**

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our Social Integration Services student, Sebu Baghdassarian. He will be deeply missed by our Galileo Adult Education Centre family. He made a positive impact since his arrival at our school in September 2018. His optimistic outlook on life has taught us to embrace every waking moment and spread kindness every chance we get.

Sebu Baghdassarian was a brother, a son, a friend, and most of all, a fighter. Sebu suffered from Costello syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that affects multiple parts of the body. It is characterized by delayed development and intellectual disabilities, distinctive facial features, unusually flexible joints, and loose folds of extra skin. Most people with this condition face severe heart abnormalities. Throughout his life he underwent numerous medical operations; still, he wore a perpetual smile on his face. Unfortunately, in early August 2020, Sebu passed away due

to complications related to his condition. We find comfort in knowing he is no longer suffering; instead he chose to spread his wings.

Sebu admired his Galileo teachers and staff. He deeply adored his family, the Montreal Canadians, pizza, cooking, dancing, drawing hearts and the colour pink. Sebu was one of a kind. He always spoke his mind, was an independent thinker and a great chef. He taught us all that humour is a joy that should be shared.

Teaching grief management skills to students with special needs requires particular attention as many experience difficulties with emotional expression. The addition of physical distancing during these trying times has made it more demanding for teachers to console their heartbroken students. However, we have been offering our students varied coping strategies and ways to direct their fluctuating emotions. Some students mentioned the concept of heaven and envisioned Sebu riding on one of his classmate’s horses that had recently passed. Another student imagined him in a hot air balloon with her late grandfather.

The process of grief is individualized, so we encourage our diverse learners to validate their feelings and communicate regularly.

At Galileo, we actively encourage our students to exchange memories that they shared with Sebu and celebrate his life every day. Some do this through drawing, others write in their journals, and one class even created a tribute video for him. His homeroom teachers, along with his classmates collaboratively created a special table in his honour and decorated it with his pictures and a memory box where students leave private messages to him in a safe space. This special box was crafted using his signature heart and our chance to say thank you to Sebu for the way he brightened our lives.

*To read a eulogy, visit Galileo Adult Centre’s Facebook or Instagram accounts. Watch Galileo’s tribute video on the Galileo SIS YouTube channel.*

*Lisa Trotto and Caroline Jelovcic are SIS teachers at Galileo Adult Education Centre.*



Remembering Sebu Baghdassarian. (Photo, Nancy Ruscitto)





# Adult education in the time of COVID: The Place Cartier experience

By **Matthew Kennedy**

Place Cartier Adult Education Centre offers a range of programming to students from Montreal and the surrounding area. The Allancroft Campus is home to one of the province's largest Social Integration Services programs, Endeavour, as well as a highly successful alternative program called Delta. One of the many elements that draws students to the centre and its various programs is the warm, caring environment we cultivate on campus. When COVID-19 struck, it was important to us that we find ways to sustain our students' access to our centre and staff.

Part of the Lester B. Pearson School Board, our mandate from the government was to ensure that we established a connection with all students, but that we provide online instruction for CEGEP- and vocational training-bound students to ensure that they could complete their exams and earn the credentials required to move forward with their academic paths. But, given our strong connection with our community of learners and our commitment to accessibility, we sought to continue programming for as many students as possible. We mobilized our resources and provided our

teachers with access to professional development in online learning and by May, the vast majority of our courses were online, including those for our language learners and students in our social integration and alternative programs.

Endeavour provides special education-based social integration training in a highly inclusive setting. Before transitioning our classes online during the pandemic, we created a website for our students, which is still active here: [bit.ly/endeavouronline](https://bit.ly/endeavouronline).

Our staff created video modules of activities students could complete from home, and we hosted program-wide Zoom meetings, which welcomed up to 75 students for educational programming every Wednesday. We then launched six full-time, well-attended online classes so that students could complete their training with their teaching staff and have access to additional resources, such as music therapy and guidance counselling. With summer just around the corner, we knew we wouldn't be able to open our summer camp, so we partnered with the West Island Association for the Intellectually

Handicapped (WIAIH) to create a Summer Activity Book with carefully selected materials that would be facilitated in virtual meetings over the summer by WIAIH staff.

This fall, Place Cartier introduced three models to reach as many students as possible while also keeping our community safe. The first model offers 100 percent in-person instruction to our social integration and alternative education students, because we know they benefit most from face-to-face instruction with their teachers. Our second model is a fully online approach for our most autonomous and self-directed students who are completing higher level math and sci-

ence courses. Finally, our third model represents a hybrid approach to adult education, where each class is divided into two groups: one attends class in-person while the other attends from home via Google Meet, and then the groups switch each week. This model allows us to ensure that no more than 12 students are in the classroom at a given time, but provides students with access to the same number of hours of programming as in a non-pandemic context.

The COVID-19 health crisis has had a profound impact on society, but it hasn't changed the adult education community's commitment to reaching and teaching students of all ages, learning profiles and academic paths.

*Matthew Kennedy is a consultant for Inclusive Adult Education and Social Integration at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.*



At New Frontiers School Board, we are excited to introduce staff and students to a software called Inspiration (not to be confused with *Inspirations*, the newspaper you are reading!). This tech tool can help students turn complex concepts into visual representations, or graphic organizers, which can be used to plan a piece of writing, outline a project, or review and summarize concepts learned in class.

There are at least two reasons why visual supports are helpful to students. Firstly, visuals are lasting. Unlike spoken language, which disappears after the words have been spoken, visual supports stick around and can be referenced as needed. Secondly, a good graphic organizer lays out concepts in way that helps students see how different subtopics and ideas are related. What is the cause of an event? How do two concepts compare and contrast? What are the subtopics to the central idea? And let's go ahead and add a third reason: using visual supports can be a fun way to engage students, to allow them to showcase their creativity, while facilitating their comprehension and expression of more complex ideas.

Visual supports are great for all students, but are especially useful for those with learning

## New Frontiers School Board supports visual learning with new software

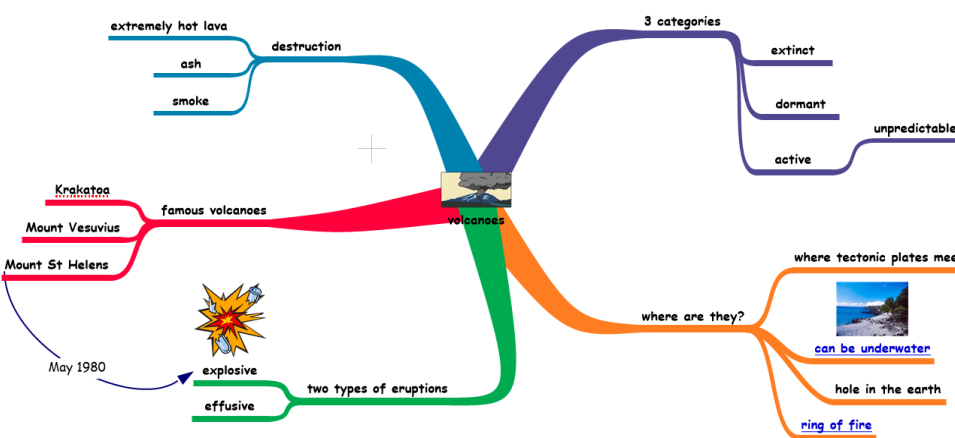
By **Laura MacGrath**

ing the graphic format to a written outline, which can then be elaborated into a piece of writing.

We have begun by providing introductory training to about 35 teachers, and will look next to our parent community to offer online information sessions to families of students who may benefit from this technology. Having some assistive technology already in place to help with reading and spelling (text-to-speech, word prediction, and dictation), we believe that Inspiration will be a welcome tool that will support students in their comprehension and expression of more complex concepts.

*Inspiration is a commercially available software for which New Frontiers School Board has a license. For information, visit <https://www.inspiration-at.com/>*

*Laura MacGrath is a speech-language pathologist at the New Frontiers School Board.*



Visual about volcanos created with Inspiration 9.2.4

difficulties, particularly those with language difficulties. In contrast to many paper-based graphic organizers, an electronic version allows students to reorganize and adjust the format as they lay out their ideas. Rather than fitting ideas into rigid pre-existing

boxes, we can construct the ideas, boxes, and links at the same time, reworking the layout as needed. We are eager to have students learn to use features of Inspiration, such as recording and inserting audio clips, adding hyperlinks to online resources, and convert-





# Collaborative response to childhood adversity in an elementary school: A partnership between researchers and school staff

By *Elana Bloom, Cat Tull, Aviva Segal, Jacqui L. Liljequist, Irene Beeman and Delphine Collin-Vézina*

According to a 2006 study in the European Archives of Psychiatry and Clinical Neuroscience on the enduring effects of abuse and related adverse experiences in childhood, brain function depends on a complex array of sensory and developmental experiences in childhood. Additionally, the negative effects of childhood maltreatment on brain structure, function and connectivity is supported in a 2016 study in Nature Reviews. When children can develop relationships with caring and competent adults, their brains develop in predictable ways. In contrast, when children endure adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including household dysfunction, neglect and abuse, brain development is derailed, affecting children's abilities to develop executive functioning and emotional regulation, and form secure attachments, according to research conducted by the Department of Children and Families in 2012. Further research in the "Nature Reviews" study states that ACEs also make it difficult for children to adapt to an educational setting.

Children who demonstrate difficulty with executive functioning and emotion regulation skills are often on the receiving end of traditional discipline approaches (e.g., detentions, suspensions), which do not create lasting and meaningful changes in learning or behaviours of students who have experienced trauma; in fact, they are associated with a variety of negative outcomes, as indicated in two studies; a 2006 study entitled "Achievement and

*Enrollment Status of Suspended Students: Outcomes in a Large, Multicultural School District*" in Education and Urban Society, and a 2015 paper, "Instead of Suspension: Alternative Strategies for Effective School Discipline" from the Duke Center for Child and Family Policy and Duke Children's Law Clinic. Strategies to support executive function (e.g. planning and organizational skills) may somewhat help students, but schools need to holistically infuse brain-based trauma-informed care along with educational and social opportunities to truly support optimal development.

Using the framework of social and emotional learning (CASEL, <https://casel.org/guide/>) can provide concrete strategies for school staff to infuse in the classroom. One example of this is helping students to regulate their emotions, as can be found in Your Calm Spot (<https://www.yourcalmspot.com/home>). These concrete guided strategies can help students shift their attention and be mindful in calming their body cues. Additionally, using restorative practices can help students to repair their relationships and be more beneficial to their social and emotional development than punitive outcomes.

In 2018, Dr. Elana Bloom, coordinator of the Family School and Support Treatment Team of the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) and of the Centre for Excellence for Mental Health partnered with Dr. Delphine Collin-Vézina and her team at the Centre for Research on Children and Families at McGill University. This collaboration

aimed to develop and enhance staff training material to expand upon the trauma-informed policies and practices currently being implemented at Verdun Elementary School (LBPSB) and to assess the program implementation. The goal of Verdun Elementary's groundbreaking trauma-informed LEADS program is to teach students lifelong skills to become resilient citizens. The holistic approach benefits all students and is especially helpful in supporting the growth and development of those who have experienced trauma. The intentional strategies and interventions help to mitigate the impact of childhood trauma. As such, this school community is an ideal partner for this new collaboration, which will build upon the existing LEADS program by adding three new components with the following goals:

1. **To create a leadership team consisting of school staff from each cycle** to guide the project and facilitate the researchers' connection to the school, and to ensure active staff leadership and collective work throughout the initiative.
2. **To document school data and approaches to trauma-informed care** and identify potential implementation challenges.
3. **To implement trainings and consultation with staff from the leadership team**, who make decisions about training content delivered to staff to best advance current practices.

Preliminary results of analyses are anticipated for fall 2020. However, teachers' responses to their initial trainings appear positive. Sarah Davey, Grade 6 teacher, said, "I know the topic of self-care was really beneficial and engaging. It got staff talking, reflecting and being more mindful of our practices. It helped us notice things about ourselves and others and gave us the language to express how we are feeling: what we can do to help ourselves and our colleagues. I especially liked the idea that self-care comes in all sorts of shapes and sizes." Further, Christine Dane, principal, believes, "The HEARTS Care Team has allowed my staff to recognize the amazing work they do with trauma-informed pedagogy and our students; furthermore, it has provided them with the opportunity to recognize the necessity of personal self-care, an area often overlooked."

*Dr. Elana Bloom is the coordinator of the Family, School, and Support Treatment Team and the Center of Excellence for Mental Health and Cat Tull is a behaviour consultant, the Family, School, and Support Treatment Team, both at the Lester B. Pearson School Board. Dr. Aviva Segal is a Postdoctoral Fellow, Jacqui L. Liljequist, MSW is a PhD student and research assistant, Irene Beeman, MSW is a project coordinator, and Dr. Delphine Collin-Vézina is the director of Centre for Research on Children and Families, all at the McGill Centre for Research on Children and Families.*

## Friends 4 Cause Christmas baskets support Galileo students

By *Megan D'Ermo*

For the second year, Friends 4 Cause, formerly known as The Italians of Montreal and Friends Organization have launched their Christmas Basket Campaign. The funds raised from the campaign will go to support special needs students at the Galileo Adult Education Centre in Montreal North. Last year, the campaign raised \$5,000.

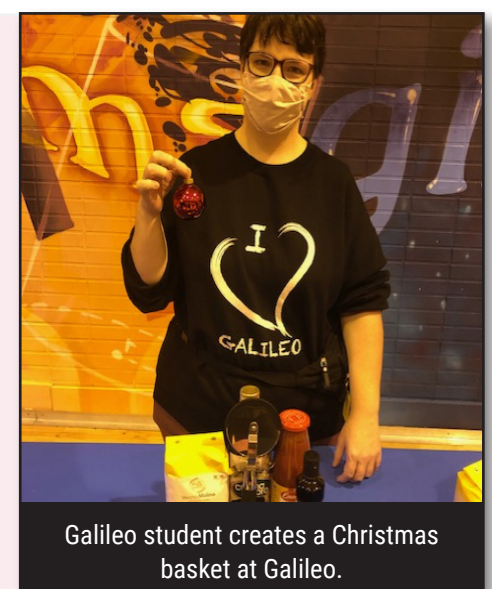
Galileo students work with Friends 4 Cause to assemble the baskets, which contain a wide range of products such as pasta, sauces,

cooking oils and traditional Italian panettone, and range in price from \$50 to \$150. Creating these baskets provides the students an excellent opportunity to enhance their work, concentration and organizational skills.

This year, the funds raised from the campaign will be shared between Galileo and The Lighthouse Children and Families (specializing in family-centered pediatric palliative care) as the Galileo students feel it's important to continue giving back to the community.

Orders can be placed through Friends 4 Cause's Facebook or Instagram pages, their website [www.friends4cause.com](http://www.friends4cause.com) or at their storefront, located at 3177 Rue Fleury E, Montreal-Nord, which will be open on weekends starting at the end of November.

*Megan D'Ermo is the events coordinator for Friends 4 Cause.*



Galileo student creates a Christmas basket at Galileo.





# WIAIH, Endeavour joined forces to provide continued learning throughout summer

By **Kristin McNeill**

The West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped (WIAIH) and Place Cartier's Endeavour Program with the Lester B. Pearson School Board joined forces this past June to create an online summer program for teens and adults with an intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder. Twenty-six participants took part in one-hour long Zoom sessions that were offered from Monday to Friday.

The idea behind the free eight-week program was to build upon skills students had learned during the school year – and continue providing the community with online learning options. Normally, the Endeavour program offers a summer program to its students, but this summer, due to COVID-19, it was cancelled. But the fact that Endeavours had taken its program online full-time for the last few months of the 2019/2020 school year meant it was well positioned to continue to provide learning opportunities in the summer.



Participants enjoy a Zoom session.

Stephanie Blanchfield, Social Integration Teacher for the Endeavour Program at Place Cartier, helped develop the summer program. "We recognized that many of our students were struggling with feelings of isolation due to the increased amount of time at home. Once the decision to cancel the summer program was made, it was

clear that we wanted to create fun learning opportunities for our students that would help keep them connected. WIAIH was looking to create a similar set of resources for their participants, so we teamed up to write a workbook full of fun activities."

The workbook provided a different theme each week, ranging from superheroes, music, the environment, to Hollywood. The structured activities included games, math, reading comprehension, colouring, recipes and fitness, among others.

Jacky Key with WIAIH, who was Summer On-line Project Lead Animator, said families and care-

givers had reached out and expressed an interest in an online summer session. She was able to create a schedule for participants, grouping them together by similar ages and familiar faces. Types of activities included were arts and crafts, trivia, stretching/yoga, show & tell, Bingo, virtual tours and socialization exercises.

"The highlights of our Zoom sessions were seeing the joy on their faces each morning when they logged on to see their peers, and their excitement to find out what activities were planned for the day. The activities were well received, and they were always open to trying new approaches to the activities in this online format. It was great to see!" said Key.

*Endeavour is an English-language social integration services-based special education program for adult learners with disabilities that is run through the Place Cartier Adult Education Centre of the Lester B. Pearson School Board. WIAIH is a registered charitable organization serving people with an intellectual disability or autism and their families on the West Island.*

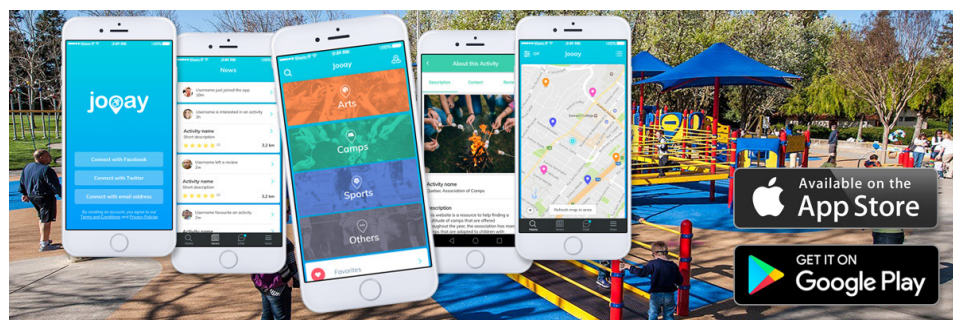


Endeavours student Logan Quinn picks up his kit for the joint summer program. (Photo, Matthew Kennedy)



## Promoting participation in leisure

By **Keiko Shikako-Thomas, Mehrnoosh Movahed and Ishana Rue**



Jooay is a free mobile and web-based application (jooay.com), developed in 2015 by Dr. Keiko Shikako-Thomas and Dr. Annette Majnemer at McGill University, to address the lack of access to information about adapted leisure activities. It is a repository of activities (arts, camps, sports, others) that are inclusive and fun for children and youth with disabilities.

In response to the current COVID-19 pandemic, the Jooay team is listing online inclusive leisure activities on the app. They now have over 300 online activities listed across the globe. Additionally, Jooay began a research study over the summer to

learn more about the challenges parents and service providers are facing to create online inclusive environments. The project aims to make best recommendations to make online adapted leisure programs accessible to children and youth with different disabilities.

For information, contact [jooay@childhooddisability.ca](mailto:jooay@childhooddisability.ca)

*Keiko Shikako-Thomas, Mehrnoosh Movahed and Ishana Rue work in the Childhood Disabilities: Participation and Knowledge Translation Lab, School of Physical and Occupational Therapy, McGill University.*

# INSPIRATIONS



Consult the  
EMSB Database of Special Needs Resources  
[www.inspirationsnews.com/database](http://www.inspirationsnews.com/database)

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514-483-7200 #7244

Featuring over 500 resources in the Greater Montreal and surrounding areas

If your business has been affected by the COVID-19 epidemic or relocated, please let us know.

We are keeping our database as up-to-date as possible to help you find the resources you need.  
Thank you in advance for your help and stay safe.

Do you have a resource to add to our database?  
Share it with us at [info@inspirationsnews.com](mailto:info@inspirationsnews.com)





# Isolation period even more isolating for Deaf, long-term care resident during pandemic

By *Natalie Constantine*

Adam Hollinger's happy, active, familiar and stable world was abruptly disrupted in March due to the pandemic. Like many residents in long-term care facilities, he was confused and suffered from depression, sadness and anxiety.

When he contracted COVID-19 in May, it made matters worse and added to his loneliness. He was isolated in his room for many weeks with visits from only medical staff, whose protective equipment of masks and face shields made them all look the same, unrecognizable to him. This was the ultimate frustration he felt as a Deaf person who relies on lip reading and American Sign Language (ASL) to communicate.

Hollinger longed to see his mother who visited every weekend before the pandemic caused everything to shut down. He also missed my weekly meetings with him, where we conversed in ASL, read books, celebrated Jewish heritage and holidays, made crafts and played games on an iPad. We were also in the midst of developing sign language workshops for the immedi-

ate staff who care for him, with Hollinger as the teacher and me in a support role. He had been very excited about this and helped choose the signs he wanted the staff to learn.

But, all of Hollinger's belongings had to be sent for disinfection, and he was transferred to another wing, resulting in fear and disorientation. His glasses and hearing aid were misplaced, which made communication impossible at times. This also increased his isolation.

To be proactive, I distributed clear plastic masks (which were hard to come by) to the staff at the hospital to use with Hollinger. But since staff members were changing regularly, I stopped distributing them, in order to be able to save them for his regular caregivers. Finally, the dust began to settle, and his family and I took action to restore his well-being.

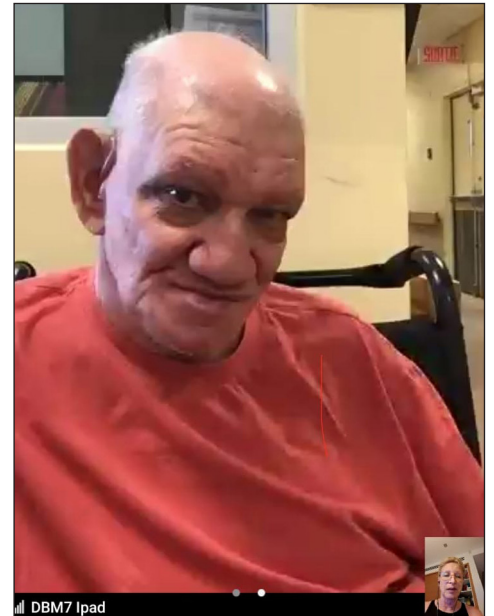
Hollinger's sister, who lives in Israel, wrote to the administration asking for an iPad so the family could meet on Zoom. I joined in all of these meetings, interpreting for his mother, sister and cousin.

A staff member needed to be present in Hollinger's room to set up the technology and help him during the call. The calls were very positive. Hollinger had never used technology to communicate with others and is now adjusting to it beautifully. He was so thrilled to see everyone, often overwhelmed with emotion, with tears filling his eyes.

In addition, Hollinger's sister asked me to teach her basic ASL. Prior to the pandemic, she had wanted to learn but never took the opportunity.

Hollinger fully recovered from the virus by mid-June. With the enormous help from a front-line staff member, weekly Zoom meetings are still going strong, and Hollinger has accepted his new normal. My hope is to resume our visits and celebrate Hollinger's favourite holiday, Chanukah, in person in December.

*Natalie Constantine is an ASL interpreter and educator.*



Adam Hollinger enjoying a Zoom call with his sister Carol in his long-term geriatric care facility.

## Treiser Maison Shalom adjusts to the new normal

By *Hindy Friedman*

“At first we were all very scared,” said Mrs. F., a parent of a long-time resident at Benjamin and Vanda Treiser Maison Shalom. Scared is an understatement. Treiser Maison Shalom, which comprises two residences for individuals with moderate to severe special needs, went on total lockdown as soon as COVID-19 hit. Our residents, who are considered vulnerable, could not leave the home, could not receive visitors or enjoy volunteers and specialty activities. Our essential staff had to follow extensive health and hygiene protocols to ensure the safety of our residents. Thankfully, everyone stayed well.

Slowly but surely, we were authorized to resume certain activities albeit quite differently than before. Our specialty activities had to be held outside the homes, with the residents on the back porch and the specialists in the yard. “It was really nice to see everyone again, even if we had to be socially distant,” said Dov Punski, our pet

therapist. “Even Bear, the beloved Belgian Malinois, was happy to see everyone!”

We all learned to enjoy new ways of communicating with families and friends. Families were finally allowed to see their loved ones, even if “it is not the same on the back porch. Zoom has been a fantastic experience. Jeffrey enjoys seeing himself in the screen while we talk,” Mrs. F. said.

The real heroes in all this are the front-line workers, our fantastic staff. “The staff has been wonderful, going above and beyond to ensure everyone's safety and well-being - physically and mentally,” she said.

Although we must continue to follow strict health and hygiene protocols and limit certain activities, overall, we are very grateful for where we are today. Our new normal.

*Hindy Friedman is the coordinator of the Benjamin and Vanda Treiser Maison Shalom Inc.*



Residents enjoy a socially distanced visit with Bear.





# Arts & Entertainment



## APPLE TV+ REVIEW

By **Mike Cohen**

Since the launch of AppleTV+, I resisted the temptation to subscribe or even take a sneak peek for fear of being hooked. I already gave in to Netflix. However, from the moment I tuned into *Little Voice* the binge-watching began.

*Little Voice* focuses on Bess (played by Brittany O'Grady), a young woman who is trying to get her big break as a singer in New York City while holding down a number of jobs and caring for her brother Louie (played by Kevin Valdez), who is autistic. There is the typical love triangle and a scenario involving sexual orientation and a mom who deserted the family. I loved every minute of this nine-episode series. Louie is a walking encyclopedia on Broadway. He lives in a home for people with an autism spectrum disorder.

Valdez himself was diagnosed with autism at the age of 22 months. His por-

## Actor with autism: Kevin Valdez is a standout in *Little Voice*



trayal of the loveable and quite brilliant Louie is inspiring. Bess stands out as the loyal and protective younger sister, who stands up for her brother at every turn.

The show features original music and even a cameo appearance from Broadway smash *Waitress* creator Sara Bareilles and her partner Jessie Nelson, Tony winner Chuck

Cooper and Broadway alum Colton Ryan co-star, and there is a deluge of theatre history knowledge dropped throughout the episodes, with homages to *Dear Evan Hansen*, *Fiddler on the Roof*, *Carousel* and others.

In an interview with *Playbill*, Valdez was asked how similar or different to his own experience is the portrayal of people with

autism in *Little Voice*? “Honestly, sometimes the way Louie acts in the show, I kind of act the same way a little bit,” he said. “When these moments do happen in the script, I try to think of those times I had where I wasn’t so perfect and use them as an inspiration. I hope that theater fans can convey the message that even though people can have some differences, they are basically the same, but might use a different approach to tackle issues.”

What does he hope audiences can learn about people living with autism from watching Louie? “I hope other people learn that life is difficult for people with autism as they try to fit in with a normal lifestyle,” he replied. “It takes a lot of work and discipline for them to master reacting in the same way in situations as others. People have to be more understanding and patient and with hard work, they can learn to do it.”

See this video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=quYu5kX29hg>

Here is hoping for a Season 2!

## You Bet I Dance!

### Germany’s first dance therapy program for youth with cerebral palsy

The highly anticipated Ramsgate International Film & TV Festival usually takes place in June, however this year’s program was put into question by the pandemic. “We had hesitated to make it online,” said festival director Sylvie Bolioli. “But the entire world has been living in great sadness and frustration [so] if the filmmakers can manage to bring you a little bit of happiness...it’s a job well done.”

The online rendition took place from June 11 to 14 and screened the full program of 178 independent pieces, which focused on diversity, innovative storytelling and new technologies.

The spunkily titled, *You Bet I Dance!* film, directed and produced by Pape, Stern and Schürmann, featured a dance program for children with cerebral palsy (CP). The first of its kind in Germany, it was hosted at one of the world’s most prestigious dance companies, the Staatsballett Berlin.

Viewers accompany Leonie and Hannah and their families as they discover

the freedom of dance; a world where they are uninhibited by their physical limitations.

“Dance is a form of expression, yet not everyone is granted the same access to it,” stated Australia’s Transitions Film Festival. “*You Bet I Dance!* changes this narrative and explores what is possible for children with physical and cognitive limitations when given the opportunity.”

According to program director Stefano Witzel, dancing is a unique medium that allows participants to see beyond their challenges. “They may not be able to walk so well, but there are other ways [to self-express].”

The dance participants are a testament to this resilience. In spite of being wheelchair-bound and dependent on a speaking device, Leonie’s parents remarked, “[Our daughter] wants to dance and so she shall...She has a strong urge for life and wants to try everything.”

According to the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability, dance can be a powerful therapy tool for enhancing motor coordination, but also building confidence and self-expression.

By **Randy Pinsky**

The challenge, however, is finding programs willing and able to accommodate special needs. “Every time I would mention [my daughter has] CP, they didn’t know how to handle it,” shared Hannah’s mother. “And that was the end of that.”

The film featured some magical moments, such as when the dancers all posed at the barre, either supported in a standing position or in wheelchairs, and a touching image of Leonie’s mother helping her daughter stand in coveted ballet slippers.

Hannah shyly reinforced: “To dance is to be happy, where I can be myself.” More than simply a social exercise, the program was also a powerful opportunity for parents to connect. As confided by the mother of twins with CP: “I feel good because I am [at last] not alone in my problems.”

The film ends on a beautiful note, with a professional ballerina balancing on pointe while spinning a delighted Leonie in her wheelchair – a true testament of the power of dance.

## MOVIE REVIEW



For information about *You Bet I Dance!* or the Ramsgate Film Festival, visit <https://ramsgateiftvfest.org/>





# Arts & Entertainment

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Eunice: The Kennedy who changed the world** By Eileen McNamara (Simon & Schuster, 2018) President Kennedy's sister Eunice paves way for special needs legislation

By Elaine Cohen

Author Eileen McNamara's fitting title reveals the unheralded pivotal role President John Fitzgerald Kennedy's (JFK) sister Eunice Kennedy Shriver (1921-2009) took in propelling quality of life in health, education and special needs.

The deaths of Shriver and her youngest brother Senator Edward Kennedy several days apart in 2009 received public attention. Journalist/educator McNamara spotted an error in a renowned U.S. publication that misidentified Shriver as founder of the Special Olympics program.

McNamara, who had won a Pulitzer Prize for commentary and had reported on social issues for three decades at *The Boston Globe*, was also director of Journalism at Brandeis University. She recalls many encounters with the Kennedy entourage, albeit not Eunice Kennedy Shriver. Curious, she looked for her biography but discovered that Shriver had never authorized or written one. Married to Sargent Shriver, prime mover behind the Peace Corps, the couple had five children.

Digging further, McNamara was astonished to learn how Shriver masterminded so much but, she writes, the patriarch of the family, powerful business tycoon Joseph Kennedy Sr., controlled the family dynamics. He made sure his sons' careers and clout came first. Despite being an open womanizer and a tough family disciplinarian, Kennedy loved and took pride in his wife and their nine children. Therefore, Shriver achieved her goal by taking a low-key role.

Throughout her life, Shriver silently battled an autoimmune condition that sapped her strength, weight, ability to sleep, and had other detrimental side effects. Unlike her father, who preached "win at all costs," she favoured the mantra, "Let me win, but if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

- As far back as 1947, Shriver headed a task force on juvenile delinquency, long before her brother Attorney General Robert Kennedy entered the scene.

- A hands-on coach, she ran a summer camp for children with intellectual disabilities and included young people, regardless of colour or race. She hosted it at her estate in Maryland. Even

though she resided in a largely segregated state, she arranged for the children to share swimming facilities – a year before civil rights legislation.

- Shriver convinced President Kennedy to establish a research institute for child health and human development at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) that recognized children are more than small adults.

- She worked in a women's federal penitentiary in West Virginia and raised awareness of women's needs.

When Shriver was a very young child, she and her older sister Rosemary (born in 1918) were playmates. Rosemary's intellectual challenges meant she was unable to keep up with her siblings or please her father. Shriver empathized with Rosemary's struggle in a family that thrived on physical and intellectual prowess, competition and winning. Rosemary's intellectual disability was compounded by mental illness and when her tantrums threatened her father's aspirations, she was sent away.

Even their mother, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, and other members of the family weren't privy to the magnitude of Rosemary's botched lobotomy in 1941. The procedure rendered Rosemary gravely infirmed in every sphere and unable to function.

...continued on p. 42

## Film shares world-changing impact of Camp Jened

By Ishini Fernando

**C**rip Camp: A Disability Revolution is a 2020 documentary directed by Nicole Newnham and Jim LeBrecht about the world-changing impact of Camp Jened, a summer camp for people with disabilities located in New York's Catskill Mountains that closed down in 1977. LeBrecht appears at the start of the documentary in old footage of himself as a camper in 1971. He has spina bifida, which requires him to use a wheelchair. In the film, he explains how isolated he felt in his childhood and how he found barriers everywhere in a world he wanted to be a part of but one that did not accept him. Attending Camp Jened allowed him to break down some of the barriers and make friends for life.

There is plenty of old footage shown of their time there. The former campers, who each appear in the film to speak of their experiences and struggles as individuals with disabilities, describe Camp Jened as a utopia. It was a place where teenagers could be teenagers without the labels and stereotypes, where nobody was sidelined. The people in the film speak a lot about how the relationships they formed there, the discussions they had and the inclusivity they experienced had a profound impact on their lives and inspired political change. Many of the campers became disability rights activists.

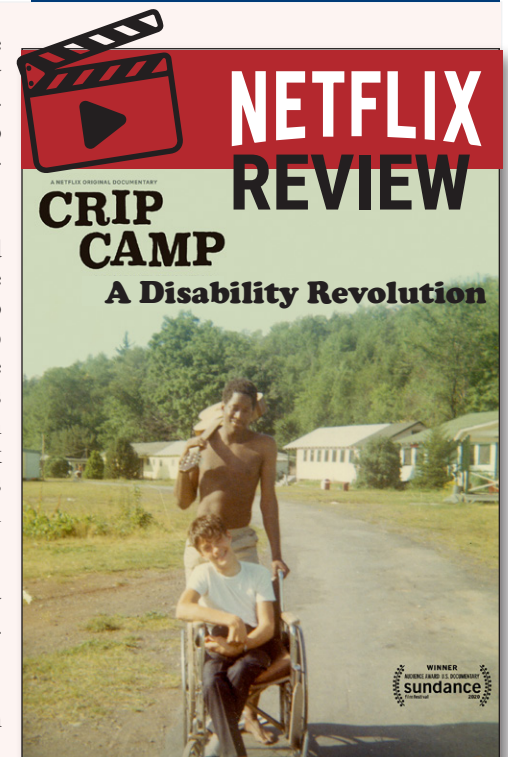
Amongst them is Judith "Judy" Heumann, who is internationally recognized as a leader in the disability community. As the

documentary goes on to show what life looked like for the campers in their early adulthood, Heumann is seen playing a critical role in reuniting the former campers to make waves in the disability rights movement in the United States.

*Crip Camp* isn't only touching, real and inspiring, but it is also educational in the way it serves as a great introduction to disability history. LeBrecht and his Camp Jened friends had met in a world before the Americans with Disabilities Act. Viewers can see how Camp Jened empowered them to change the world for the better and break down barriers. The documentary also does an excellent job at capturing the delightful personalities of the former campers.

Parents should know that the documentary is rated R for some language and sexual references, and is not suitable for children.

Watch *Crip Camp: A Disability Revolution* on Netflix.







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## Assistive Technology Feature



Ioana Gandrabur plays guitar as her guide dog Cheerio listens.  
(Photo, Guide Dogs for the Blind)

**“I’m a blind guitarist, and I’m a blond guitarist.”** And so commenced Ioana Gandrabur in the ironically titled “As I See It: A Blind Musician’s Point of View on the Importance of Accessible Technology” virtual talk, hosted by AIGeeks (Artificial Intelligence) on July 8.

An internationally renowned classical guitarist, Gandrabur has never let her visual impairment hold her back. Not only is she fluent in seven languages, she holds four music degrees from institutions in Canada, Germany and Switzerland.

Whether she is teaching or performing, the Montrealer challenges assumptions about disability through her staggering list of accomplishments.

“As a kid, one of my dreams was to take photos...Who would have thought my iPhone would be able to make this possible! It’s a bit of a dream come true,” said Gandrabur at the beginning of her talk.

One of her favourite apps is the versatile “Seeing AI.” Through Optical Character Recognition, individuals with sight limita-

## A blind guitarist’s view on accessible technology

By *Randy Pinsky*

tions can “read” and identify images without having to rely on sighted friends.

Assistive technologies (AT) like these are instrumental for enhancing empowerment and independence. Whereas visually-challenged individuals were formerly required to purchase specialized (and expensive) computer programs, Gandrabur comments, “Apple Inc. products now have accessibility practically baked into the box instead of being an afterthought,” indicating significant strides towards inclusion.

Another AT field being developed for those with limited vision is navigation. While Gandrabur is mobile and independent thanks to her guide dog, Cheerio, she highlighted the potential of the “Clue” app, which films a route and then replays it in reverse.

“More and more, the phone camera is interpreting things for me and making sense of the world in a way that would have been unimaginable not too long ago,” she marvelled.

But is AT always a good thing? While it can empower clients, there is also the danger of over-dependence. Ever the musician, Gandrabur made the analogy with a metro-

nome: It’s useful as a guide, but not to be used in performances.

So, although the apps are continually improving, Gandrabur stated: “If there was a challenge between my guide dog and the app, the dog would win.”

This connects to the current debate about the relevance of braille with the existence of text-to-speech apps. The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness recommends that technology enhance – not replace – braille, for it is not used simply for reading, but also for writing and creating. An intriguing blend of tradition and technology has been developed with braille available on smart phones, and Gandrabur boasts she can type faster than most sighted people.

Some may still wonder why a blind musician would need to be able to use a camera or “hear” a description of an image, to which Gandrabur replied: “So I can capture the moment and share it with others – just like everybody else.”

*Listen to the “As I See It” talk at [https://youtu.be/I57UBWL\\_QnU](https://youtu.be/I57UBWL_QnU).*

## Getting organized with new assistive tech!

By *Andrea Prupas and Olivia Colalillo*

**W**ith the new school year now well under way, routines are becoming embedded and with them new methods of organization are being tested. Organizational skills are necessary for students to acquire in order to experience success at school, however we rarely think about teaching them explicitly. Often we assume that students will naturally pick up on the ability to organize themselves. (This becomes even more evident in the first years of high school, when students have to juggle many subject areas). So it’s normal that students could struggle with acquiring these skills as they transition into new school routine

Something we can do as parents and teachers to support our students who need explicit organizational supports is to “scaffold” organizational skills. A scaffold is like using a ladder to approach a new skill; we use multiple steps to practice and eventually this will allow for independence with the new skill.

With this in mind, why not try some new assistive technologies to help scaffold for organization? What’s important to keep in mind is not to overwhelm our students with too many different options. Adding many different technology tools can actually increase organizational demands on students, so choosing one simple tool and system is our first recommendation.

Here are two simple options that we recommend for our students this year:

### My Project Planner (EMSB planning/homework tool for elementary students)

Sometimes students have difficulty knowing “where to start” with homework or a larger project. This template is designed as a method for students to break down, or “chunk” their homework or project into tasks. It incorporates strategies for creating and organizing tasks into a specific time-

line, and helps students with time management as well. Created in Google Slides, it allows students to plan and organize visually. This template can be downloaded by parents or students and used in Google Drive, or it can be added by teachers to a Google Classroom. And if you enjoy using paper to get organized, it is printable too!

### Google Keep (senior elementary students and secondary students)

Google Keep is a free notetaking and organizational tool that is part of the Google Suite of classroom tools (available to all EMSB students and many students in Quebec English school boards). It’s a very simple tool that allows students to create labels to organize projects and notes for each class. Keep also gives students the ability to create to-do lists. One of the best features is the ability to use different organizational methods based on student strengths. Students can

easily take notes with pictures or drawings instead of text, and can create notes with their voice using their mobile devices.

More details on these tools (videos, templates and how-to’s) are available on our website. (<https://bit.ly/31WLj8i>) Head over to check them out.

*We love hearing from our students, teachers and parents. Let us know what assistive technology tools you’re using to get organized!*

*For more information about AT at the EMSB, visit [at-emsb.org](http://at-emsb.org).*

*For information about executive functioning AT, visit <https://u.org/3jNrepp>.*

*Andrea Prupas and Olivia Colalillo are assistive technology consultants at the English Montreal School Board. Contact them at [aprupas@emsb.qc.ca](mailto:aprupas@emsb.qc.ca) and [ocolalillo@emsb.qc.ca](mailto:ocolalillo@emsb.qc.ca).*





# Sports



## Autisme Karate builds confidence in kids, teens and adults with special needs

By *Martin C. Barry*

When veteran instructor André Langevin was first raising his son, he sometimes wondered whether the time-honoured martial art he'd mastered could also be used to improve the life of young Philippe who was diagnosed with autism.

Langevin quickly discovered that “yes,” karate was indeed a helpful tool in the development of his son, who, at the age of 5 didn't know how to speak. Today Philippe holds a degree in mathematics from McGill University.

His father has no doubt that providing a specially modified form of karate training to autistic children, teens and young adults can help to improve their quality of life, while also paving the way to vast new possibilities.

*Inspirations* snuck in an opportunity to speak with Langevin during a break at an Autisme Karate session at Valois United Church in Pointe Claire on September 13, where he was scheduled to teach three more classes that day. In addition to the West Island location, sessions are also provided in St. Hubert. They were previously also offered at the Miriam Centre in Town of Mount Royal and will resume again in January 2021.

Langevin's approach to teaching karate to those with special needs is relatively unique in that parents actively participate in ses-

sions. As he takes the class through exercises and techniques, the parent works with the student, providing support and encouragement, while also helping build confidence.

Added to this is the ambiance of the sessions. Many of the parents spoke of the program as a “community” event, with everyone treated as an equal. Langevin, whose knowledge of martial arts goes back more than 30 years, has been teaching karate to persons with special needs since 2008. He believes that his own family's experience with an autistic child provided him with an intimate understanding of the dynamics involved. Several instructors work with Langevin, including two who have black belts. He also has a black belt in karate, as does Philippe.

Among the nearly 20 parents, children and young adults who took part in the session at Valois United, the consensus was virtually unanimous – the program works. “Since he started this program, Andrew is more confident, more controlled,” said Judy Vargas, whose 16-year-old son earned his yellow belt since joining the program. Noting that Andrew has ADHD and tends to be easily distracted, she said that since enrolling in the program “he's more with it.

“Now he has so much more balance than even we do, and he loves it,” she added. “This is the one activity that he loves to



Autisme Karate enthusiasts Pierre Cardinal and Melody and Nancy Boissonneault at an Autisme Karate practice in Pointe Claire. (Photo, André Langevin)

come to without fail.” Adds Andrew's father, Al Hill, “It doesn't take much persuading to bring him out.”

Rosie Saxe, whose 29-year-old son, Jason, is perhaps the oldest member of the Valois United group, is also pleased with the progress he's made in the past six years. “He was very resistant at first due to anxiety,” she said, pointing out that Jason managed to advance to brown belt despite the early challenges. Saxe said she was particularly impressed by the community approach used in the program. “It's family-style – supported by family instructors who have kids or adult children on the spectrum,” she said, adding that she was able to become an assistant instructor after a few years of participation. According to Saxe, the parent's role in Autisme Karate is a key to the program's success.

“In karate you always work with a partner,” she said. “But it's a lot less stressful to work

with your own parent as partner, because they know how to adapt instructions to their own child. And that's why this works: the parent is always there to support their child.”

*All participants must be accompanied. Brothers and sisters are welcomed.*

*For more information, email [autismekarate@hotmail.com](mailto:autismekarate@hotmail.com) or visit [www.autismekarate.com](http://www.autismekarate.com).*

*Martin C. Barry is a Montreal-based writer/photographer with 23 years of experience covering issues all over the region.*



Seen in the foreground, program newcomers Liam Dandurand (left) and his mom, Allie Angrave (right), practice a karate kick during their first class, under the supervision of Autisme Karate instructor André Langevin.



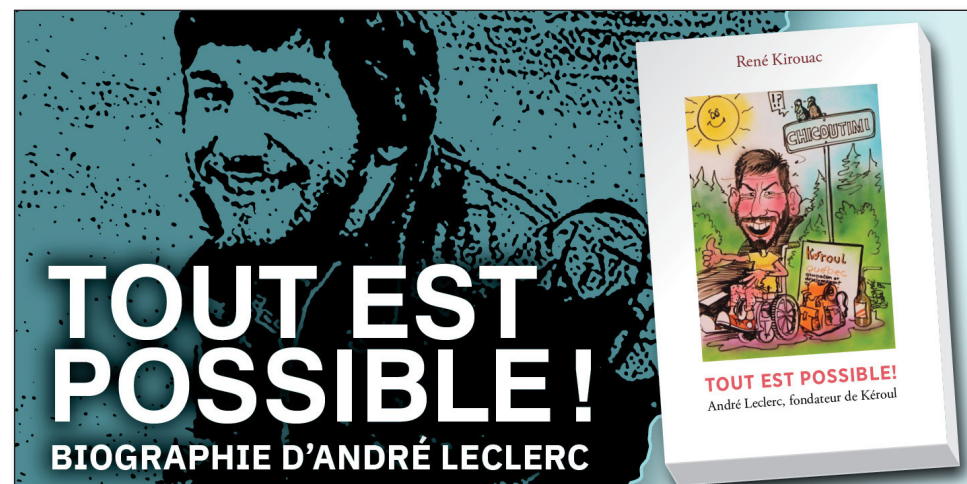
# Biographie d'André Leclerc, pionnier du tourisme accessible au Québec

Par **Emmanuelle Assor**

Certains ne connaissent pas encore le nom d'André Leclerc, dont la biographie *Tout est possible* vient d'être publiée. Pourtant, on doit à cet homme la création de Kéroul, un organisme dont la mission est de rendre accessible le tourisme et la culture à toutes les personnes vivant avec des capacités physiques restreintes.

En décembre 2015, André Leclerc contacte René Kirouac pour rédiger ses mémoires, un projet qui lui tenait à cœur. Quatre ans plus tard, après avoir rencontré 120 personnes et eu accès à 60 ans de documents personnels et d'archives, le manuscrit voit enfin le jour. Un récit incroyable, du début à la fin!

Dans cette biographie, on découvre la vie d'un homme au destin unique, né avec une paralysie cérébrale après une erreur médicale. Dès son jeune âge, André refuse les limites que la société lui impose. Il rêve de travailler, d'avoir une voiture, une job, de se marier et de fonder une famille. Il fait de sa



vie un long combat pour que les mentalités changent : « Je veux vivre comme tout le monde. Je veux que les gens dits *normaux* cessent de nous considérer comme des meubles. C'est pas facile. Il faut continuellement se battre pour prouver que l'on peut, que l'on existe. » (p.63 de la biographie)

En octobre 1976, il manifeste avec un groupe de personnes handicapées devant l'hôtel de ville de Montréal pour revendiquer le droit à un service de transport adapté. « Quand un représentant de la Ville apparaît à l'entrée de l'édifice, il se jette littéralement par terre et gravit les marches à genoux en demandant au représentant de l'aider. » (p.67)

En 1977, André pose en photo dans son lit, couché en chaise roulante avec un drap sur lui. Il dit ainsi au commun des mortels : « Non, les personnes handicapées ne dorment pas dans leur chaise roulante ». Il veut défaire les tabous et mettre fin aux clichés entourant la vie des personnes vivant avec un handicap.

Après avoir été traité de rêveur, il est maintenant considéré comme un homme qui peut tout faire. Son esprit entrepreneurial hors du commun l'a mené à faire de son combat individuel, un combat pour le bien collectif. Marié et père de deux enfants, André Leclerc a mis de l'avant l'importance du tourisme pour tous. « Si on doit attendre que les autres défis soient réglés, on aura manqué bien des occasions en cours de route pour utiliser le tourisme comme moyen privilégié d'intégration et pour en donner l'accès aux personnes handicapées. Le tourisme, c'est aussi ça la vie », conclut-il. (p.89)

Informations pratiques : Formats imprimé, EPUB et audio disponibles.

## Champions, un documentaire lumineux

Par **Emmanuelle Assor**



L'athlète canadien Malcolm Jovahny Borsoi, l'athlète marocain Houdaifa Mohamed, l'athlète kenyan Kelvin Tanui, l'athlète canadien Stéphane Piccinin et l'athlète saoudien Thamer Ahmed. Piccinin célèbre sa médaille de bronze gagnée au 1500 m lors des Jeux mondiaux d'été 2019 dans le cadre des Olympiques spéciaux aux Émirats arabes unis. (Crédit photo : Les Vues de l'Esprit\_Les Films du 3 Mars)

J'ai regardé le documentaire *Champions* avec beaucoup d'intérêt, étant moi-même mère d'un enfant autiste. En résumé, pour ne pas tout raconter, on suit le parcours atypique de Stéphane et de son amie Audrey, deux sprinters canadiens, lui autiste et elle ayant des défis particuliers (cela n'est pas dit clairement, mais on

comprend qu'elle souffre d'une certaine hyperactivité et de difficultés à fonctionner dans un monde neurotypique). Ainsi, *Champions*, filmé par le frère de Stéphane, nous montre l'univers intime de ces jeunes athlètes au profil différent de ceux que l'on a l'habitude de voir. Évidemment, leurs défis sont d'un haut calibre car lorsqu'ils courent,

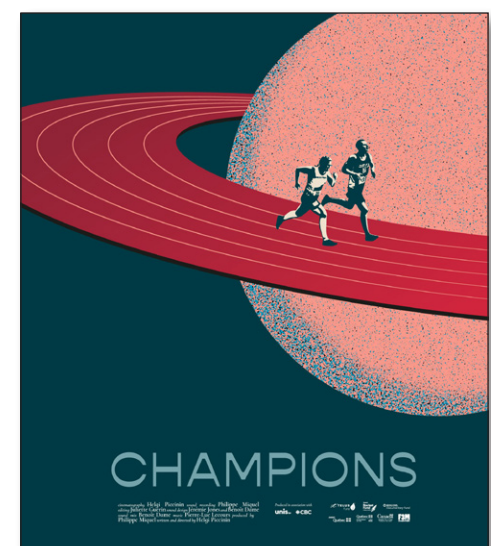
ils doivent non seulement être en forme, concentrés, déterminés, mais surtout non affectés par le monde extérieur! Magnifique défi pour un autiste qui s'exprime peu et pour une jeune fille ayant de la difficulté à gérer « la sauterelle qui n'est pas tranquille dans sa tête »! Filmés du début des compétitions pour les Olympiques spéciaux à leur aboutissement à Dubai, un moment de grande tension et d'excitation, les protagonistes nous épatent par leur maturité et leur capacité de faire face à tant de nouveautés! Contrairement aux images vues trop souvent au cinéma, d'entraîneurs durs s'exaltant sous les yeux de parents obsédés par la victoire, on découvre l'univers sensible et complexe de deux personnes attachantes.

Une *coach* bienveillante dit dès le départ les mots clés de cette aventure : « You Are Normal People Doing Special Things ». Face aux déceptions, aux échecs, à la peur de perdre et de ne pas « être à la hauteur », nos protagonistes sont tout à fait *normaux*! Seul dans sa chambre d'hôtel à Dubai, loin de ses parents et de tous ses repères, Stéphane dit avoir des pensées négatives et se sentir seul après une course décevante. Mais un réseau de soutien est sur place pour l'encourager et l'aider à faire face à ces nouvelles émotions. Quant à Audrey, elle aussi traverse tout l'éventail de sentiments liés à cette compétition : fausses attentes de gagner haut la main, tristesse, espoir, joie, sentiment d'accomplissement.

Personnellement, je retiens de ce film que le dépassement de soi est la seule chose qui compte vraiment. Je suis aussi ravie de voir que pour une fois, on met en scène un autiste qui n'est pas un savant intellectuel ou un artiste. Loin devant nous, Stéphane et Audrey utilisent leur corps pour se défouler, pour courir plus vite et pour être fiers d'eux-mêmes. Pour moi, ce sont de sacrés champions.

Regarder *Champions* en ligne sur <https://cinemaduparc.com/en/online-cinema>.

Emmanuelle Assor est journaliste pigiste et la fière mère d'un garçon autiste de 10 ans.







# Inspirational Eats: **Deville Dinerbar** adapts with curbside pickup

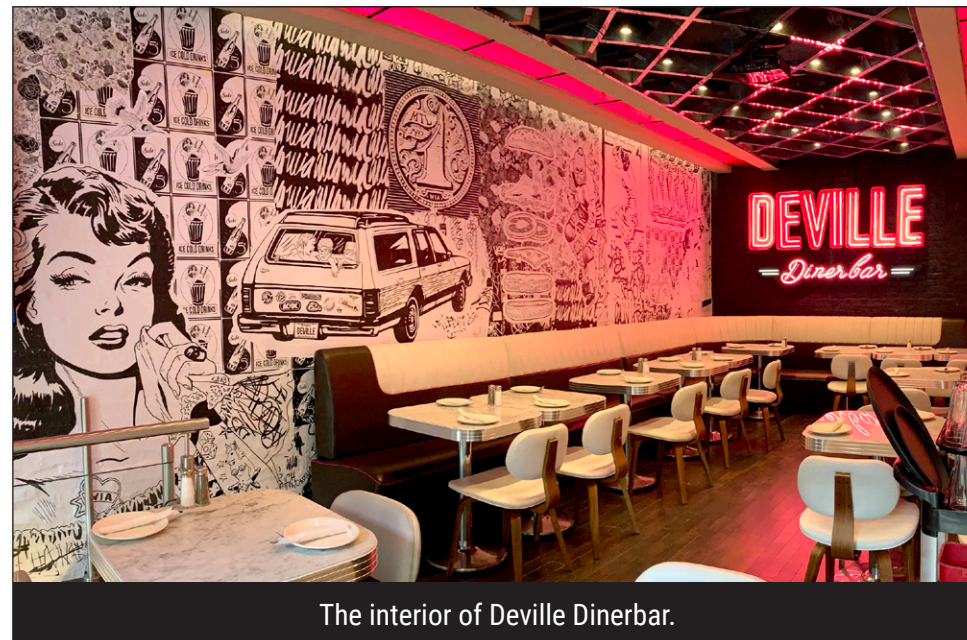
By **Mike Cohen**

As of this writing, restaurants are not permitted to have customers dine inside. Only takeout and delivery is permitted.

For the physically disabled, at home delivery is now more readily available than ever. Those with mobility issues who can drive are able to take advantage of curbside pickup service – again something that was not always so common. Because people are taking so many precautions due to the pandemic, it is highly popular to merely pull up at your destination, call to say you have arrived and pop open the trunk.

The Tzemopoulos family, for instance, are justifiably proud of their trendy downtown Stanley Street Deville Dinerbar ([www.devilledinerbar.com](http://www.devilledinerbar.com)), a sister property of the iconic Reuben's Deli & Steakhouse. When they reopened last summer, they added curbside pickup and delivery by Uber Eats to their options.

When Adam Tzemopoulos shared the news of Deville's return, I immediately jumped at the opportunity to make a curbside pickup. The Tzemopoulos family have been operating Reuben's Deli & Steakhouse on St. Cath-



The interior of Deville Dinerbar.

erine St. for more than 40 years now. They operate under the RD3 Restaurant Group.

Founded in 2011, Deville pays homage with a modern feeling to the great diners of yesterday. There is a massive bar where

you can order yourself a house cocktail or alcohol-infused Craft Shake. Deville specialties include Adam's Beef Back Ribs, Crispy Mac and Cheese Stuffed Wontons and signature steaks selected from 100 percent premium Canadian grass-fed beef.

There are 180 seats plus a seasonal terrasse. The detailed and separate bar menu features classics, house cocktails, mini-fish bowls and craft shakes, with or without booze.

I decided to get lunch to bring back and enjoy at the office, but not only for that day. In fact, it lasted me three.

As for Reuben's Deli & Steakhouse (<http://reubensdeli.com>), items from its fabulous menu are now available for delivery via Uber Eats, with everything prepared in the Deville kitchen. You can do a pickup at the same storefront window on Stanley Street. I took advantage of the option recently and it was so much fun to enjoy their comfort foods again.

There was a grilled karnatzel, with some pieces of toasted pumpernickle bread and mustard; the smoked meat mac and cheese, the roast beef melt with fries (my personal favourite of sliced roast beef served on thick grilled rye bread topped with roasted garlic mayo, sauteed onions and melted Swiss cheese), the original Reuben sandwich (a savory grilled sandwich served on thick sliced pumpernickel, piled high with a half pound. of sliced smoked meat, melted Swiss cheese, sauerkraut and Reuben's secret sauce) and for dessert a huge piece of Deville's chocolate food cake.

*Deville Dinerbar is located at 1425 Stanley St. near St. Catherine. For more information, call 514.281.6556, email [info@devilledinerbar.com](mailto:info@devilledinerbar.com) or log on to [www.devilledinerbar.com](http://www.devilledinerbar.com).*



Deville's popular hamburger and fries.

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### Book review continued from p. 37

Moreover, no one in the family would dare question the father regarding her fate or permanent absence. She remained out of the picture for 30 years. The father, along with his trusted chief assistant kept up the façade until JFK entered the political fray and the press was about to unravel the truth.

After Joseph Kennedy Sr. succumbed to a series of strokes, JFK arranged for his mother and siblings to invite Rosemary for visits. Furthermore, the Kennedy family advocated for changes and invested in scientific advancements and legislation that continues to perpetuate breakthroughs and benefit people all over the world.

At the beginning of the book, McNamara points out that unlike today, "mental retardation" was considered an appropriate term.

However, it is not one she favours but had to apply it in referring to annotated content. The author's non-fiction magnum opus is educational, well-paced and includes meticulous annotation. Readers can focus on the chapters and subjects that spark their interest. It is chock full of components that are anything but dry, yet conveyed in good taste. Readers are apt to relate to parallels in society then and now.

McNamara's book enables readers to come to their own conclusions. She sought out members of the family and others privy to records, conducted interviews, and drew opinions and quotes. Among them are examples of Shriver's child-rearing, household practices and views. Though well-loved and respected by her husband Sargent Shriver and their five children, the offspring point out difficulties that arose because of her frequent absences.





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