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INSPIRATIONS

Celebrating inclusive communities / Célébrons nos communautés inclusives



**BOIVIN
RETURNS TO
ALMA MATER MACKAY**

**EMSB STUDENT
SERVICES INNOVATE
DURING PANDEMIC**

**ALOUETTE'S
PRESIDENT
ON STUTTERING**

Simon Chang, second from left, met with Galileo Adult Education teachers, from left, Lisa Trotto, Alain Tourigny, Vera Tronca and their hand-made puppets at Chang's showroom on March 24. Photo: Pickle Creative



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Building Dreams



Editor's message

Mike Cohen

For *Inspirations* newspaper, 2022 marks our lucky number 13 anniversary.

After reading each edition, I come back to the day when I came up with the name "Inspirations," for that is how I feel as I read through page after page – totally inspired. Our readership has expanded well beyond those connected to the special needs community and, in the coming months, we have some exciting new plans.

Simon Chang has been a most active edition sponsor, implicating himself in activities at different schools and centres, visiting multiple venues and enthusiastically interacting with students and staff.

I got to meet the charming Catherine Boivin last fall at a campaign launch for a new accessible playground at the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton schools in NDG. She has co-chaired the fundraising program with her father Pierre, the former president of the Montreal Canadiens. Catherine attended the Mackay Centre School as a child. You will get to know her in this edition.

You may have heard of Mario Cecchini, the president of the Montreal Alouettes football team. Prior to assuming this post, he worked in the broadcasting business. Cecchini is a terrific communicator, which makes it hard to believe that as a child he had a serious stuttering problem. Read our story about how he overcame this.

One of our sponsors, plumber Ben Levine, provides us with very helpful advice on how to make home washrooms more accessible. Ishini Fernando is back with her terrific entertainment reviews, and I am happy to contribute my regular Report from Parliament Hill and Inspirational Eats restaurant reviews with a special needs accessibility component. When I personally feel comfortable enough to travel again, I will resume my Adapted Travel column.

A big thanks to Wendy Singer, Kristin McNeill, Zülfiye Erdem and the rest of our devoted production team!

Happy reading.

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INSPIRATIONS

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Galileo SIS team honoured for innovative puppetry program

by *Anita Szabadi-Gottesman*

This year's winners of the Simon Chang Difference Maker Award are a trio of Social Integration Services (SIS) teachers from the Galileo Adult Education Centre of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB): Vera Tronca, Alain Tourigny and Lisa Trotto. Sponsored by the Simon Chang Foundation for Change, this award honours individuals who are making an impact in the special needs community.

Over 100 neurodiverse adult students participate in the puppetry program as part of the theatre arts curriculum at Galileo. "We have full support from the EMSB for innovative programming, allowing our students to experiment and excel," said Martina Schiavone, principal. "Having our teachers recognized with this award not only reinforces that students are not limited as to their disabilities but motivates our teachers to continually innovate and showcase their incredible work. Working with the puppets allows our students to take their in-class learning and express themselves, amplifying and transferring their acquired social and communication skills."

full participation by students across all levels and range of disabilities. "We see our students gaining such a heightened sense of accomplishment and pride, and we are witness to so many transformative experiences." Characters such as Nona Maria, Princess Fiona, Lady La-La and various animal puppets represent a cross-section of society and provide teaching moments covering topics from bullying and racism to current events. "We want to give our students pleasure and joy through the program, employing humour reinforcing their social skills," said Tourigny. "The overriding goal of the program is to allow our students to keep growing, reaching their full potential to integrate as much as possible into general society when their time at Galileo is over."

Trotto is touched that her dedication to her students has been acknowledged by this award. It has not only heightened her pride and confidence as an educator of special needs adults, but it has recognized her contribution to the special needs community. "I am most proud of being able to help my students reach their goals," she said. "Being an advocate for diversity is synonymous with being a practitioner for change using courage, compassion and connection to my students."

For Tronca, the puppetry initiative allows the teaching

team to showcase the talents of the students by integrating them into numerous aspects of the program. "Our students are relentless, setting no limits as to what they are willing to learn," she commented. "My passion for working with this incredible student population is watching them shine each step of the way."



Last November, the puppet team was thrilled when Montreal fashion designer Simon Chang expressed interest in participating in the project. Recognizing the Galileo puppetry program has allowed Chang to merge his creative talents with his hallmark hands-on philanthropy. He recently welcomed Trotto, Tourigny and Tronca to his Montreal atelier. "Mr. Chang showered us not only with a huge assortment of materials, inspiration and creative ideas but he is truly an advocate for this population encouraging educators to become difference makers in their practice. We thank him for his recognition through this award," said Trotto.

The Galileo Adult Centre puppetry program students perform not only for their fellow students and families at Galileo, but they have taken the show on the road to share with many mainstream EMSB schools. "We are so proud of our students spreading the word of inclusion and empowering them to the best of their abilities," beamed principal Schiavone. "With recognition from Simon Chang and his foundation, we can keep showcasing the incredible work of our teachers and allow our students' continued growth."

"I was drawn to the puppet project immediately because of the joy that puppets can bring, and the power puppets have to help us communicate, lift our spirits and bring us all together," said Chang. "I am thrilled to honour Lisa, Vera and Alain and help them further their work. I look forward to continuing to support them both personally, with creative work, and through the Simon Chang Foundation for Change. When we all work together, we can accomplish wonderful things." ■

If you have a Difference Maker to nominate, email us at info@inspirationsnews.com.

Anita Szabadi-Gottesman is a freelance writer, editor and public relations consultant in Montreal.



Alain Tourigny, left, Vera Tronca, Simon Chang and Lisa Trotto have fun discussing materials for puppet decoration at Chang's showroom on March 24. Photo courtesy of the Simon Chang Foundation for Change

Choosing fabrics, forming the puppets' bodies and faces, learning to manipulate the finished product and teamwork are just some of the skills the students learn and perfect as part of the program. With his background in theatre alongside his special needs teaching credentials, Tourigny points out that working with puppets allows for

The Simonizing continues!

by Wendy Singer

Fun fashion at Mackay

Simon Chang is sharing his fashion expertise at the Mackay Centre School of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) in preparation for their Fun Fashion for All show, scheduled to take place on June 9. This project is spearheaded by Bella Flanz, a Grade 5 student in the school's reverse integration program, with the support of teacher Christina Sollazzo and her colleagues, classmates and the school's administration. Bella's mission is to make

sure that all of her classmates in Cycle 3, who will be the models in this show, have access to fun and colourful fashion.

Luca "Lazylegz" Patuelli will work his magic choreographing the show, and Laurier MacDonald Career Centre's (EMSB) Hairdressing and Aesthetics students will be on hand to do the models' hair and make-up before they hit the runway. Stay tuned to *Inspirations'* social media and website for a recap of the show.



From left, Faye Swift, Chang's business partner; student Bella Flanz; Simon Chang and teacher Christina Sollazzo met to discuss the Fun Fashion for All show at the Mackay Centre School on March 22.

Atme addresses educators on speaking tour

Last November, Chang recognized Steven Atme with the Simon Chang Difference Maker Award, recognizing his leadership in motivating people to reach for their dreams. To honour Atme and the 10th anniversary of his speech "Special People Have Dreams," the Simon Chang Foundation for Change sponsored and organized, in collaboration with *Inspirations*, a special speaking tour where Atme, who most often presents to students, would address educators.

From January to April, Atme spoke at McGill University's Faculty of Education, EMSB schools, and addressed resource staff through the Centre of Excellence in Autism at the Lester B. Pearson School Board. Atme shared his childhood experiences, from being bullied to having difficulties speaking, and explained how critical the support of his family and teachers was in leading him to the platform he now has to influence others.

He encouraged staff to never give up in searching for and nurturing each student's passion. Atme was celebrated at an award ceremony that he attended via videoconference at Galileo Adult Education Centre on April 1.



Steven Atme, left, and Simon Chang met at Chang's showroom on October 19. Photo: Pickle Creative

Creating calming spaces at Perspectives

Chang is consulting with Lorena D'Alessandro, head teacher at Perspectives I and II of the EMSB's Outreach Network, to decorate new dividers that are being used in classrooms to provide students with a space to focus and lessen distractions, relax, quietly read or reflect.

"Many of our students can benefit from a space where colour, texture and images can bring them peace, joy and comfort," said D'Alessandro.

Perspectives staff and students will be preparing mood boards over the summer, detailing colour and theme (animals, the ocean) for each divider. This project will be continued in the fall.

Simon Chang and Lorena D'Alessandro met to discuss the divider decoration project at Chang's showroom on Chabanel St. on April 8. Photo: Pickle Creative



Thank you!

Special thanks to David Byer from Orly for the assortment of buttons and to Susan and David Bloomfield from Damar International and Jeff Feldman for donating fabrics and furs to the Galileo puppets project, John Grant High School's apron project, Perspectives divider project and the Mackay Centre School's fashion show.

Moment in Time recognized for innovation

On April 5, The Simon Chang Foundation for Change's Moment in Time Program received the Jewish Programming Award from the Association of Jewish Aging Services (AJAS), a global association of not-for-profit community-based organizations, rooted in Jewish values, which promotes and supports the delivery of services to an aging population. The award recognizes programs developed and implemented by AJAS organizations that are innovative, creative and specifically designed to enhance the spiritual well-being of the older adults they serve.

The Moment in Time Program services the elderly at the Donald Berman Maimonides Geriatric Centre and the Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare Centre by giving residents the opportunity to have a simple wish come true. Wishes have ranged from enjoying a meal from a favourite restaurant to watching a sports match in person. It is a key component of Chang's foundation's Arc of Life Program.



From left: Gary Stoopler, Donald Berman Maimonides Geriatric Centre (DBM) and the Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare Centre (DBJ); Danny Baum, vice-president Randi Gitnick and director Karen Flam, DBM and DBJ; and Don Shulman, president and CEO of Association of Jewish Aging Service (AJAS) at its conference in Beverly Hills, California on April 5 as the team accepted the Jewish Programming Award from the AJAS.

Awesome parents

by *Lorri Benedik*

In May 2000, Vicky Vriniotis and Emru Townsend welcomed their son Maximus. “We had concerns about Max as an infant – he cried a lot and would not be soothed,”

Vriniotis said. “I attributed his difficulties to my postpartum depression and the stress of moving houses when he was six weeks old.”

Vicky Vriniotis

At 18 months, the pediatrician found Max big for his age and falling short of developmental milestones. She ordered a CT scan, bone density and genetic testing, which revealed that Max has Sotos syndrome, a genetic disorder characterized by excessive physical growth in early childhood and some cognitive impairment. The couple put no limit on expectations of what their son could achieve.



Max began attending a socialization group two mornings a week at Centre de réadaptation de l'Ouest de Montréal (CROM). Vriniotis returned to her coordinator job at Merck, and soon Max was integrated in the company daycare.

In 2007, Emru Townsend became very ill and was ultimately diagnosed with leukemia. He had chemotherapy but the treatment did not work. His only hope was a bone marrow transplant. The international registry eventually found a match, but the transplant was not successful; they were told he had weeks to live. “Before Emru passed away I told him I was thinking of asking my parents to come live with us, to help with Max,” Vriniotis said. “He thought it was a fabulous idea.”

Emru Townsend died in November 2008, at age 39. “Two months later my mom and dad moved in. Having them with us was incredible,” said Vriniotis. “It allowed me to grieve properly for my husband and begin to find myself again.” Max has always been close to his extended family and friends. “He has a unique connection with each person. Their love for him is layered, like flavours in a gourmet meal,” she said.

Max has enjoyed his involvement with the Special Olympics. Before the Covid-19 pandemic, he competed in bowling and swimming. He attended Summit School for 10 years, graduating in 2021, and recently started at Endeavour – a continuing education program for adults with special needs run through the Place Cartier Adult Education Centre of the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

“Max is joyful, kind and loves saying hello to everyone,” said Vriniotis. “Our happy-go-lucky gentle giant may have a promising career as a Walmart greeter.”

Max Townsend and his mother Vicky Vriniotis in Dollard-des-Ormeaux in March 2022.
Photo courtesy of V. Vriniotis

In 1985, Ann and Graham Taylor were eagerly anticipating the birth of their first child. When Adam was born, their excitement turned to despair when they learned he had Down syndrome. “The shock was tremendous,” said Ann Taylor. “The doctors spoke of the challenges he would face and what a strain it would be to parent him.”



From left, Ann, Adam, Rebecca and Graham Taylor at Adam's high school graduation from Chambly Academy High School in Saint Lambert in May 2005. Adam missed his June graduation ceremony as he was admitted for a bone marrow transplant, so his high school hosted a special graduation ceremony. Photo courtesy of A. Taylor

Ann Taylor

The couple fell madly in love with their cuddly, sweet baby. They knew little about Down syndrome but stayed positive and chose to focus on his abilities. They were confident that, given the opportunity, Adam would write his own story. Four years later, their daughter Rebecca was born. She and her brother grew to be very close.

The family home, in St. Lambert, offered everything within walking distance. “Adam had a thirst for independence,” Taylor said. “We hoped members of the community would welcome him and ensure his safety.” This worked out well. Adam became acquainted with the local crossing guard, convenience store owner and librarian.

Taylor advocated fiercely for her son and got him into elementary and high school classrooms with technicians to help him thrive. “Adam worked hard,” said Taylor. “He also taught us to celebrate life.”

At age 13, Adam was diagnosed with leukemia. He had invasive treatments and went into remission. “We are grateful that Adam had wonderful high school years,” she said. “He experienced romantic love and sucked as much out of life as he possibly could.”

Adam dreamed of attending Champlain College, but it did not have an integration program for special needs students.

Taylor began working with others to bring such a program to the college. Adam relapsed when he was 17. He endured more treatments, including a bone marrow transplant, which coincided with the first session of Champlain's brand-new special needs program called Post-Secondary Alternative Community-Based Education (PACE). Adam Taylor was the first student admitted to the program.

Sadly, one month later, Adam lost his battle with leukemia and passed away. He was 20 years old. After he died, the program was renamed Adam's PACE, in his honour. The program is a partnership between the Riverside School Board and Champlain College. Taylor has chaired the steering committee since day one and is still at its helm.

“There are currently eight special needs students in the program,” she said. “It's joyful for Graham, Rebecca and I to witness these young adults living Adam's dream.” ■

Share your Awesome Parent with us at info@inspirationsnews.com.

Boivin returns to alma mater Mackay to raise up new playground

by *Lorri Benedik*

Catherine Boivin has a smile in her voice when she talks about the Mackay Centre School, where she attended pre-kindergarten through first grade in the mid-1980s. “I was born with spinal muscular atrophy, which is a very rare genetic disorder,” Boivin said. “I got my first motorized wheelchair at Mackay and recall how much fun it was, learning to drive.” Getting around on her own provided a measure of independence and a boost to her self-confidence. “I remember the feeling of inclusiveness at Mackay and the positive, empowering atmosphere,” she continued.

“At age four, I decided that I wanted to play the violin, but with limited upper body function it seemed impossible. My mother was determined we would find a way.” With the help of a custom-built chair made by a Mackay technician, Boivin was able to assume the correct posture with arm support so she could hold the instrument. This made it possible for her to play and perform.

After leaving Mackay, Boivin continued her elementary and high school studies at Académie Michèle-Provost in downtown Montreal. “I transferred to Collège Jean-de-Brébeuf for my secondary five year. They had begun to integrate girls into the school a few years earlier,” she said. “My high school graduation was one of the first that included young women.”

Boivin went on to complete her two-year CEGEP program at Brébeuf before heading to the Université de Montréal and Concordia University for undergraduate and master’s degrees in theatre design. These multidisciplinary programs explored set, costume and lighting design. Her undergraduate program included a minor in art history.

“After university, I freelanced for a few years and developed my own style of 3D renderings [illustrations] of theatrical set concepts,” said Boivin. “In 2014, I was recruited by 4U2C Creative Studio, a subsidiary of Cirque du Soleil.”

“For the past couple of years, I have focused on my other passion – fundraising, advocacy and government policies for the disabled,” Boivin said. “I work with Muscular Dystrophy Canada and sit on the board of directors for the Canadian Organization for Rare Diseases.” She explained that a big part of both their mandates is to raise public awareness and lobby for government budget allocations. The goal is to provide equitable access to medications, timely clinical trials and therapies.

More than three decades after leaving the Mackay Centre School, Boivin has circled back. Since autumn 2021, she has co-chaired the Habilitas Foundation fundraising campaign for a fully inclusive

playground at the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton schools, with the slogan, “Every Child Has A Right To Play.” Her co-chair partner is her father Pierre Boivin, Montreal businessman and former president of the Montreal Canadiens hockey team. Boivin and her dad have enjoyed working on the campaign together. The project is expected to break ground this spring, in hopes of being completed in time for the new school year starting in September 2022.

“My daughter Catherine is incredibly committed to creating a better world for people with disabilities; she is a constant inspiration to her mother and me,” Pierre Boivin said. “I have done a lot of fundraising in my

career but co-chairing this campaign with my daughter is the highlight of my philanthropic work. It feels great giving back to the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton schools. It’s the place that gave Catherine the right start in life and allowed her to blossom.”

Boivin is currently in reflection mode about what to do next. “During the pandemic, my path deviated from theatre design to advocacy for the disabled. I love making a difference in the lives of individuals with special needs but miss the creative aspects of my previous career,” she said. “Ideally, there will be a way to bring the two together – I already have some ideas in development.” ■

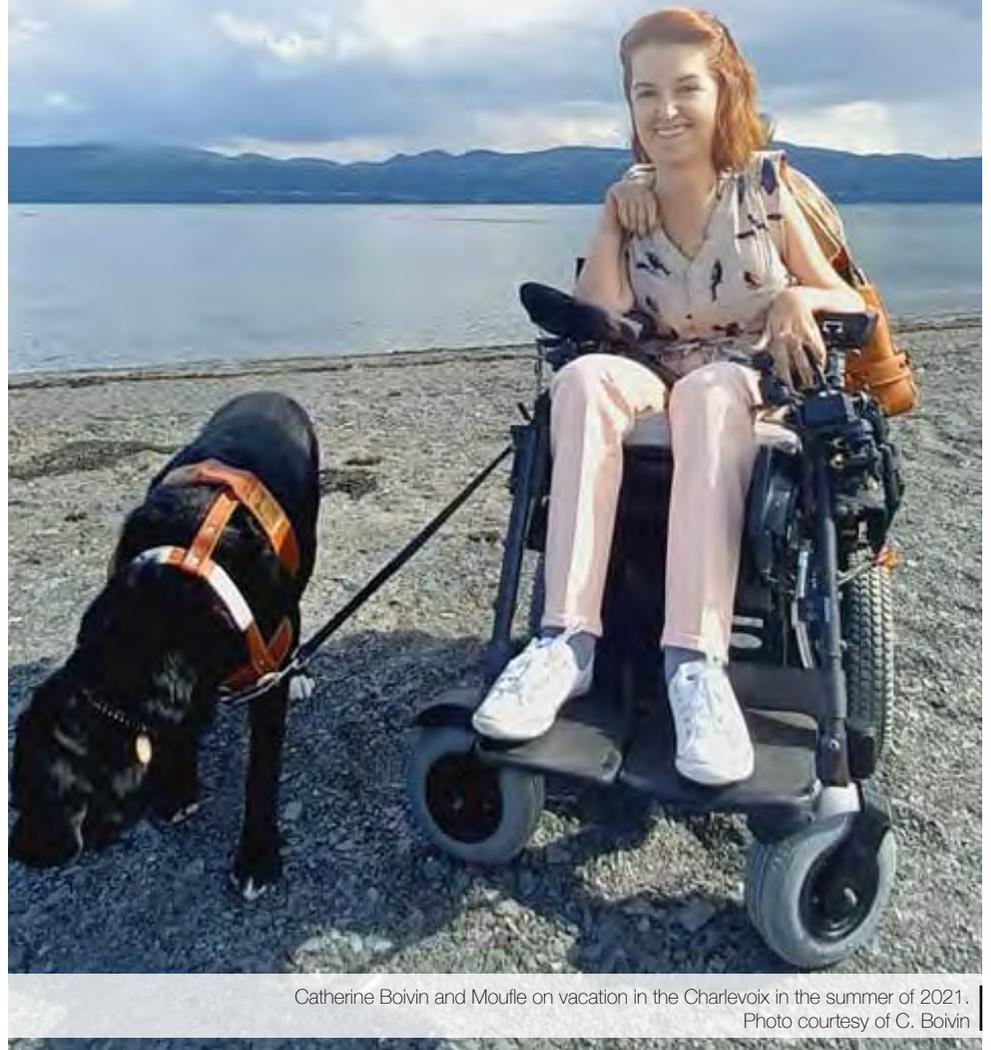


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Making playgrounds accessible for all

by *Randy Pinsky*

Who doesn't love playgrounds or parks? For many special needs families, though, it is not so simple to find the ones that have the accessibility features they require to have a positive and playful experience.

Regular play is critical for children's physical, social and emotional development. Beyond ensuring that structures are accessible, inclusive playgrounds also incorporate stimulation components for those with developmental or intellectual challenges. Examples include interactive sensory panels with brightly coloured dials, switches and textures.

Playground consultant Landscape Structures defines inclusive playgrounds as "universally designed, sensory-rich environments...that go beyond minimum accessibility to create play experiences that meet a variety of needs and interests."

While municipalities may strive to make parks more accessible by adding ramps and specialized equipment, other details need to be considered. One example is the adapted swing in Zainab Alsmadi's neighbourhood park in NDG. The mom of four explained that while the swing is well-suited for children with reduced mobility such as her son, it is a challenge to reach it as the park is covered with sand and wood chips. The friction and drag make pushing a wheelchair difficult, as opposed to the smooth rubber surface many parks are transitioning to.

"The swing is right in the middle of the playground," said Alsmadi. "So when I take my son to the park, I have to take the stroller down into the wood chips and manoeuvre his big stroller to the swing." She often requires the assistance of other parents to do so. The lifting in and out is physically tiring, she noted, especially as her child is almost eight years old. "The best accessible playground would be where the parents don't have to do a lot of physical moving around. I just want him to enjoy the park like any other kid."

Municipalities in and around Montreal have taken some important strides in making playgrounds more accessible. Christine Latreille, writer and creator of Stroller Parking, a website dedicated to reviewing local parks, also assesses their inclusive attributes. Here are some of the geographically diverse gems she has found:

Meades Park (Kirkland)



"Meades Park was the first universal/all-ability park for Kirkland and just one of a handful on the West Island," wrote Latreille. There is a raised sand table, a wheelchair-accessible play structure, an inclusive spinner and a sensory wave boat. There are sign language and domino panels near the ramp, and one of the on-site washrooms is wheelchair-friendly.

Tony Proudfoot Park (Pointe Claire)



Opening at the beginning of the pandemic, the park has a wheelchair-accessible glider, double-wide ramps, sensory panels and a tandem or friendship swing. Picnic tables are accessible with a shorter bench on one side to allow children with wheelchairs to sit right at the table. Families with autistic children will appreciate rocking gliders for those dealing with sensory overload. The park is named in honour of the late Tony Proudfoot, a former Alouettes football player and Pointe Claire resident, who

became a community advocate and speaker about ALS when he was diagnosed with the disease.

Ahuntsic Park (Ahuntsic-Cartierville)

"While I've seen quite a few wheelchair-accessible products with access ramps, they rarely have anything to actually play with," observed Latreille. "Ahuntsic Park is a fantastic exception. Everyone will find plenty to engage them both on and below the raised ramp." With sensory panels and tandem swings, kids will be entertained all day long. On hot days, they can enjoy the inclusive "rocking boat" and raised water table.

Wilson Park (Verdun)

"I saw the proposal for this park [in 2017]... and all winter I was like, 'I hope Verdun does it right.' And they did," wrote Latreille. Wilson Park has an elevated sand and fossil table, an accessible sand shovel and winding paths. Ground-level sensory panels, adaptive swings and an accessible picnic bench are situated "right near all the action," she observed. This helps bring all children together in a common play space.

Confederation Park (NDG)



Perfect for little builders, the park has accessible sand shovels, stations with gears and chimes and intriguing sensory panels. There's a cocoon area for quiet time, a wobbly ramp and an adapted seesaw. A fun sensory addition is a roller table fashioned with rolling metal tubes to slide down.

Ferland Park (Saint-Léonard)

One of Montreal's first inclusive playgrounds, according to Latreille, the park

has won awards for its inclusive design, especially for children on the autism spectrum. The splash pad has accessible activity panels, and it is even possible to borrow a water-adapted wheelchair.

Lac-à-la-Loutre Park (South-West)

Recently overhauled, "ground-level spinners provide vestibular input (movement and balance critical for brain development) [and] a roller table gives sensory stimulation and helps improve upper body strength," Latreille explained. Friends can chat as they relax on adjacent saucer swings.

Francis-Xavier-Fontaine Park (Sainte-Catherine)

Besides "aiding in cognitive and physical development while also being wickedly fun," Latreille writes that the park was named in honour of a little boy who saved his friend from drowning but lost his own life in the process. A highly accessible park with ramp access, there are adapted trampolines, a rocking boat for balance development and tons to do to "stimulate the senses," including tactile panels and bongos to play.

Saint-Joseph Artisan Park (Salaberry-de-Valleyfield)

After local residents complained about the park's inaccessibility, it was completely redone in 2017. It is accessible (though on wood chips), has an adaptive swing and a Sensory Wave Climber, described as "the industry's first playground climber that allows children of all abilities to enjoy the benefits of climbing while enhancing sensory development."

Inclusive parks involve kids of all abilities, allowing them to develop new skills and build community. Mom Alsmadi emotionally shared a memory of her son walking autonomously for the first time at an accessible park in the West Island. By holding onto handrails, "he discovered he could do something on his own—a sudden sense of independence." ■

Share your favourite accessible park experience with us at info@inspirationsnews.com.

For more info: <https://strollerparking.ca>.

Summit School's Herman Erdogmus on nurturing potential, plans for expansion

by *David P. Stein*

Inspirations spoke with Herman Erdogmus, director general of Summit School since 2013, to discuss the school's accomplishments, challenges and exciting plans for the future.

What is your history at Summit School?

I was hired as a teacher at Summit and continued as an educational consultant. I eventually became the school's vice principal, and then principal, and I have now been the director general since 2013. I've always had an interest and deep passion for working with students with special needs.



Herman Erdogmus, director general of Summit School, in the school lobby on March 21.
Photo: Summit School

What is Summit School's greatest achievement?

Summit's greatest achievement has been a demolition of sorts. Every day we work to demolish the barriers that our students face. While these barriers are often linked to their conditions, more often than not, they have more to do with the social perception. These are barriers that can prevent their potential to shine through, a potential that we know resides within each and every one of our students. Demolishing these barriers has been and remains Summit School's greatest achievement. Education at Summit is not about altering the student. It's about giving them the tools to navigate the barriers towards an independent way of life.

How do you break down your students' challenges?

Each child is unique, has particular challenges, needs and strengths. How we work

to break down those challenges has to do with, really simply, acknowledging that fact. Over 60 years, we've developed a unique interdisciplinary approach that involves an entire team of experts, from teachers and occupational therapists to behavioural interventionists.

This team works together to form an educational game plan completely customized to each student. We then accompany them on their educational journey until they're young adults. So their greatest challenge is how unique they are, you could say. They're unique and yet society still expects them to fit into a very restrictive, conventional mold. We show the students how to navigate that. Hopefully we can continue to educate society so that the world we live in can be more conducive and accepting towards people who function outside of the mold, because they have a lot to offer.

How far have we come in breaking down barriers to inclusion and how far do we need to go?

There still exists a general perception that inclusion equates to charity. It's not about charity. It's about potential. It's about celebrating and developing the strengths that our students possess and then helping them to showcase those strengths. Our students don't need charity, they deserve respect. Through our educational model at younger grade levels, we help students to recognize and develop that potential. Through our initiatives, particularly our Summit Marketplace and job placement initiatives, we help to show employers what our older students can bring to the table. We're seeing in many respects that people with disabilities are often better at their jobs than people without disabilities. Employers are starting to clue into that. People in general are starting to recognize that many developmentally diverse individuals see their conditions as strengths, as integral parts of their identity, as something to be proud of. But there's still a long way to go and a lot of work to be done.

What is your vision for the school?

We never really focused on a calculated vision, because we've always been at

the forefront of applying innovative and original educational techniques organically. The concern has always been about just doing what's best for the students, and our programs grow out of that concern. We realized long ago that our students need job placement opportunities. Now we're the only school for the developmentally diverse with an army of job placement coaches that accompany our students on their placements. We realized we were at the forefront of educational best practices, so we launched an in-house research centre to help develop those best practices in unison with researchers across Canada. We realized expression through art really helps our students grow, so we're now launching one of the largest creative arts centres for the neurodiverse in North America. Ideas and the willingness to roll with those ideas without fear of hesitancy drives innovation. We've always done that organically and that has brought us to where we are. Our vision is just to continue allowing our students and their interests to drive us.

You are expanding the school. Tell us about it.

Yes, we will soon be breaking ground for The Summit Centre for Creative Arts and Physical Education. We like to say that it's going to be a Canadian "Juilliard for the Neurodiverse" that will harness the power of creative expression and physical activity to empower student development. Studies have shown that inclusion in visual arts programming improves communication and self-expression. Inclusion in drama programming builds empathy and understanding. Physical activity improves school readiness and academic performance, and improves executive function in youth with ASD, ADHD and Developmental Coordination Disorder. So the new Centre is developing ambitious creative arts programming on a scale that no one has seen in this field, and then our in-house research centre, Summit Center for Education, Research, and Training (SCERT), will turn Summit into a Canadian hub of research in the fields of art therapy, self-expression, identity exploration, physical activity and mental health. ■

Benjamin Lachapelle brings animals to life through art and books

by David P. Stein

Creative genius Benjamin Lachapelle is this season's recipient of the *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award, sponsored by Henry Zavriyev.

"I like winning," said Lachapelle, who is thrilled to be recognized for his artwork on animals, which he hopes will inspire others.

"I've got nine favourite animals. I like zebras, dogs, ducks, tigers, elephants, cows, penguins, polar bears, and I like chickens," he said in response to whether or not he has a favourite creature.

"I like the way animals move about, where they live, how they communicate and just everything about animals," he added.

It was during his days at Laurentian Elementary School of the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, that the now 20-year-old Lachapelle discovered his artistic gift, and his deep fondness for animals. And with the help of his community and his family, he has a strong team of supporters who've witnessed him grow as an artist.

"We are so grateful for this honour. Ben and I love the work we do," said his mom Julie Chou, who is his closest teammate. "It brings us joy and purpose and is rewarding in and of itself. But being awarded for doing what we love is a completely new level of validation for us. The support and exposure this *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award brings will open new doors for

Ben. It's a win for everyone in Ben's circle of support and our community in the Laurentians," she said. She is co-founder of Autism & Arts in the Laurentians, along with Melanie Bujold.

At age three, Lachapelle was diagnosed with autism. As he grew up, he developed a passion for drawing, painting and sculpting – and grew his talents. He is also an author and illustrator of several children's books, including *How Tall is a Yeti?* available on Amazon. He has three signature styles of painting – Animalia, Extinction Protest Series and Ben's World – which express his love for animals in unique and completely different ways, his mother explained.

A multidisciplinary autistic artist with a singular focus on animals, Lachapelle's great imagination and work ethic have paved the way for success. His artwork is not just aesthetically appealing, it is expressive by nature as well.

"Ben also wrote some books which deal with the pandemic," said Chou, who aids on the business and marketing side. "[He] was very fearful of needles. He wrote *Alpha Vaccination: An Animal Alphabet Vaccination Story* after he got his first COVID-19 vaccination jab. It's a rhyming story, which openly talks about feelings and emotions many kids have about vaccinations and the pandemic in general." (See p. 37.)

Celebrating Rosemary Maratta and Autism House

by Wendy Singer

The Fall 2021/Winter 2022 *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award recipient, Rosemary Maratta, was celebrated at an intimate ceremony at Autism House on December 10. An occupational therapist, Maratta founded Autism House in 2019 to provide a safe space that offers peer-to-peer services to autistic individuals and their families. Dania Szanajda Monticciolo nominated Maratta for the award after her children were helped by her. At the ceremony, she shared touching words describing

her experience. Maratta responded with similar kindness. As a prize, Henry Zavriyev, sponsor of the *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award, provided Autism House with the funding and support to continue the weekly teen club until Summer 2022.

From left: Xavier-Henri Hervé, Henry Zavriyev, Vincent Monticciolo, Rosemary Maratta, Dania Szanajda Monticciolo and Wendy Singer at Autism House on December 10. Photo: Dylan Hervé



Benjamin Lachapelle creating artwork in his home in Mirabel in March. Photo: Julie Chou

"As part of Ben Animalia's social mission to promote autism acceptance and inclusion, Ben reads at local elementary schools and does sculpting activities with the kids. Sometimes Ben is the first autistic individual these students have met (and first autistic artist for sure!), and we feel a lot of pride and responsibility for these encounters. Ben also uses his artwork to raise awareness about wildlife, endangered animals and the environment," Chou added.

On July 9 and 10 at Dunany Country Club, Lachapelle and his art are to be recognized at an exhibit called Festival Imagine, which anyone interested can attend. (See p. 38.) "It will feature six emerging and established autistic artists (Ben being one of them) and showcase a collective exhibition of student artwork," said Chou. "It's Autism & Arts in the Laurentians' first arts festival, and we aim to make it a celebration of neurodivergent creativity, talent and diversity."

"I was quite taken with Benjamin's story, creativity and artwork. While committed to his theme of animals, he has expanded his craft to master figurines, paintings and writing and illustrating stories," said Zavriyev. "He has the true makings of an entrepreneur with the diversification of his skills into several areas. It is my honour to learn about Benjamin and support his work with this edition's *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award."

In the meantime, Lachapelle has no plans to change what's been a winning approach following his receipt of the *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award.

"I will continue to have fun and to work hard," Lachapelle vowed. His work can be found at www.benanimalia.com, at Ben Animalia on Facebook or as @benanimalia via Instagram. ■

Nominate your entrepreneur at info@inspirationsnews.com.



Emploi : Des ressources pour les personnes handicapées comme pour les entreprises

par *Marie-Pierre Beaulieu-Savard*

Depuis plus de deux ans, l'Office des personnes handicapées du Québec mène une campagne afin de sensibiliser les entreprises au potentiel d'employabilité des personnes handicapées. Celle-ci vise également à les informer sur les différents programmes, mesures et ressources qui sont à leur disposition pour les appuyer dans leurs démarches d'embauche et d'intégration en emploi.

En effet, dans le contexte actuel de rareté de main-d'œuvre, tous les talents contribuent à la vitalité du marché du travail. Des milliers de personnes handicapées sont des travailleuses et des travailleurs potentiels compétents.

De l'accompagnement pour trouver un emploi

De l'accompagnement existe pour les personnes handicapées à la recherche d'un emploi. Le Regroupement des organismes

spécialisés pour l'emploi des personnes handicapées (ROSEPH) regroupe 25 organismes spécialisés qui favorisent l'intégration et le maintien en emploi des personnes handicapées. Ces services peuvent notamment toucher l'acquisition de compétences, la recherche d'emploi, la sensibilisation du milieu de travail, l'adaptation de poste ainsi que la collaboration avec des expertes et des experts spécialisés (interprètes, ergothérapeutes). De plus, ils accompagnent les entreprises qui le souhaitent afin de favoriser l'intégration et le maintien en emploi de leur personnel handicapé.

Ressources utiles pour les employeurs

Vous connaissez un employeur qui aimerait embaucher une personne handicapée?

- › Service d'assistance aux employeurs du ministère du Travail, de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale;
- › Regroupement des organismes spécialisés pour l'emploi des personnes handicapées;
- › Section « Embauche de travailleuses et travailleurs handicapés » du site Web

de l'Office des personnes handicapées du Québec.

Services directs de l'Office pour soutenir les personnes handicapées dans leurs démarches

Saviez-vous que l'Office offre aussi une aide personnalisée aux personnes handicapées, à leur famille et à leurs proches dans leurs démarches d'accès aux services? Cette aide est gratuite et confidentielle. Elle est d'ailleurs offerte dans toutes les régions du Québec.

L'équipe des services d'accueil, d'information et de référence est disponible pour répondre aux questions sur les programmes, les mesures et les services destinés aux personnes handicapées, à leur famille et à leurs proches.

L'équipe des services de soutien, de conseil et d'accompagnement peut soutenir la personne dans ses démarches d'accès à un programme ou à un service, l'accompagner auprès des organisations ou des personnes responsables d'offrir les services, faire des représentations en son nom et, à sa de-



L'entreprise Kezber a adapté le poste de travail de Marc-Olivier et fait l'ajout de boutons-poussoirs automatiques sur les portes. Photo : Office des personnes handicapées du Québec

mande, amorcer une démarche de plan de services. ■

Pour joindre l'Office, composer le 1 800 567-1465 ou par courriel : aide@ophq.gouv.qc.ca

Marie-Pierre Beaulieu-Savard est agente d'information à l'Office des personnes handicapées du Québec.

New program at Ometz helps neurodivergent young adults navigate work and life

by *Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren*

On a snowy March day, in a brightly painted room at L'Annexe – the Ometz centre for young adults – Ashley Tevan-Long is talking with a group of neurodivergent young adults about how they can transform their passions into potential jobs. Tevan-Long is the coordinator for accès:succès, an ambitious new program launched in March, designed to help participants learn employment and social skills, as they work towards financial and professional independence.

The eight-week course includes a mix of hands-on activities, role playing, workshops and guest speakers. At the end, participants have the opportunity for a paid internship tailored to their interests and abilities. The program is free and open to the community.

“It's really helpful for these young people to be able to practice things like job interviews, workplace etiquette and budgeting in a relaxed, safe space with their peers,” explained Tevan-Long. “As important as these employment skills are, though, my biggest goal is to help participants build confidence. When you feel pride in your abilities and ease in communicating, that resonates through every aspect of your life.”

Although part of Ometz, L'Annexe has its own state-of-the-art space within the Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA, and its programs and services cater specifically to people between 16 and 35. The open concept design includes a full kitchen, lounge, computer lab and foosball table. On any given day, people might drop by for an art class or a group therapy session or just to

hang out. The informal setting is a reflection of the centre's holistic approach to helping young adults become autonomous, engaged in community and empowered to discover their unique vision of success.

“A significant number of L'Annexe's young adult clients are neurodivergent, and many are on the autism spectrum. We're seeing a growing demand for services to help them bridge the gap between completing their studies and finding a job,” explained Susan Karpman, Ometz's chief program officer. “With programs like accès:succès, we're able to connect and support neurodivergent youth on their individual journeys into adulthood.”

This is just the first of what Tevan-Long hopes will be year-round cohorts of accès:succès, and the activities will evolve with each group to address their specific needs, goals and interests. ■

To learn more about the program, including how to register for the summer 2022 group, email Ashley.Tevan.Long@ometz.ca. To find out more about L'Annexe, visit ometz.ca/lannexe. Agence Ometz is a Jewish human



Ashley Tevan-Long leads an employment workshop for neurodivergent young adults as part of L'Annexe's accès:succès program. Photo courtesy of Agence Ometz

services agency offering social, employment and immigration services.

Rachel Morgenstern-Clarren is the senior communications and stewardship officer at Agence Ometz.

EMSB Student Services pivot, innovate, to answer pandemic needs

by Wendy Singer

The past two years have been challenging for everyone, with the pandemic forcing change that had not been remotely imagined or anticipated. In March 2020, the Student Services department (SSD) at the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) sprang into action, rallying to support students, families and staff in any way they could.

Inspirations met with the department's director Julie René de Cotret, assistant directors Gail Callender and Sabrina Petrocco, and coordinator Patrizia Sansone to learn about the innovative work of their team during the pandemic.

SSD professionals cater to all youth sector students aged 4 to 21, in particular students who are considered at risk and who may or may not have a special needs diagnosis such as autism.

As the needs of the EMSB's student body evolve over time, the SSD has responded on a global level with impactful interventions. "Many students fall within some category of having a special need that is more than just academic," said Petrocco. "It could be a student struggling with mental or physical health or gender identity, for

example. The umbrella of issues has grown exponentially in the last few years."

The SSD is mandated to promote the continuous progress of students by helping them overcome the difficulties they meet, seeing to their psychological and physical well-being and developing their sense of responsibility, autonomy, initiative and feeling of belonging in their school and community. The department supports the special education services and contributes to the management of complementary services in social affairs, regular and outreach schools by providing psychological, health, social, guidance, drug education and speech and language services. It acts as a liaison between the Board and the hospitals, community and social services centres, manages the work of psychologists, speech and language therapists, guidance counsellors, occupational therapists, spiritual community animators, childcare workers, special education consultants, oral interpreters, nurses, social workers and resource people specializing in drug use.

The pandemic response

In December 2019, René de Cotret became director of the SSD. Five months later she was leading her team of professionals through unprecedented circumstances. "The unknown made it difficult, with things changing from morning to night," she said.

She described the stress level of students, families and staff as very high during this time. "Unfortunately, we have seen more students from Kindergarten to high school who are stressed." Callender remarked that students who started Kindergarten or Grade 1 in 2020 have yet to experience a normal classroom environment.

The SSD was there to help students adapt to their new school environment, especially those with difficulties adhering to the changing mandates.

The shift to the online classroom presented a steep learning curve. With the collaboration of their colleagues in the Information

Technology department, the SSD was able to help students, families, teachers and staff adjust to virtual learning at home. "We now know a lot about online learning, and we're much more comfortable with it now than we were two years ago," said Petrocco.

Many online resources that were created out of necessity during the pandemic proved to be so effective that they will continue to be used. One such resource was developed by a behavioural technician who was concerned that her students with behavioural challenges would not receive the in-person support they needed while learning at home. She developed a virtual world where, with one click, a student could enter a meditation session, practice a brain activity or speak with her directly. This resource has been shared amongst professionals.

René de Cotret, Sansone, Petrocco and Callender miss brainstorming and troubleshooting in person with their team of professionals and look forward to the time when they can safely meet again. They use virtual conferencing as much as possible to maintain and drive the teamwork that they pride the department on. "We all understand that it's not easy being on the front lines, and we appreciate what our team of professionals are doing for the students. I don't have enough words to tell them how much I appreciate their work," said René de Cotret.

"The pandemic response brought out a certain level of flexibility and patience in people even though at times there was impatience. The level of activity and creativity of our professionals, especially at the beginning when things were unknown, was incredible, and it continues to this day," said Sansone. "We are in awe of their resilience." ■

For information about the many SSD points of service, visit www.emsb.qc.ca/emsb/services/special-needs.



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Transition planning eases milestone passages

by *Anita Szabadi-Gottesman*

“Parents look to the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) Student Services department (SSD) to help their child succeed,” said the department’s special educational consultant, Michelle Aubin. “As a public school system, we can offer many specialized services focused on the uniquely individualized needs of each student.”

Transitioning from daycare to formal schooling is the first transition point both the students and their parents face. The excitement is palpable as children enter their neighbourhood EMSB school through the Pre-K or Kindergarten class with varied levels of preparedness across all domains. Some parents may have had the opportunity to meet with the school principal in advance of the school year to discuss any possible learning or behavioural issues their child may have.

“Each of our elementary schools has a school psychologist, speech and language pathologist and occupational therapist that they can consult with parental permission. They can propose strategies to teachers and parents,” pointed out Aubin. “We are focused on developing tailored strategies and pathways to help the child succeed. We also have autism consultants, behaviour management specialists, as well as assistive technology specialists who are involved in all our schools.”

Transition points from Kindergarten to Grade 1, elementary to high school and finally successful graduation are prioritized, working to prepare students as much as possible to ease these milestone passages. “Each transition point provides services ranging from Early Stimulation Classes available in certain schools geared to better preparing students entering Kindergarten through to high school – for students needing a bit more support both socially and academically – to the Transition from school to working life (TEVA - Transition École Vie Active) program focusing on life skills for graduating students at age 21,” said Aubin.

Parents play an integral role throughout ensuring a better understanding of each child’s profile. “Parents value the mindful, hands-on support their child receives at the EMSB, and they so appreciate our help,” Aubin pointed out. “We work with them as a team helping their child find

success in the classroom. Parents, teachers and students feel supported. Students may require minimal services to improve reading comprehension, for example, or more support after an autism spectrum diagnosis,” said Aubin. “Through SSD, we have the capacity to guide students through all means of challenges, including academic and behavioural issues, trauma, gender identification and sexual orientation – all in the strictest of confidence.”

This child-centred philosophy drives the SSD team to continually develop individualized enhanced learning strategies. “Multi-disciplinary planning is key to reaching our overriding goal of ensuring our students successfully graduate high school reaching their individual potential,” stressed Aubin. “Our classroom teachers are truly our heroes, and we rely on them as a constant, striving for the success of all their students.” ■

Home and school work together on ACSES

by *Jordan Stoopler*

As a mother of two teenagers with learning challenges, Rosemarie Federico has become an advocate for her children’s educational needs, first at the elementary school level for seven years, and now in her fifth year on the English Montreal School Board’s Advisory Committee on Special Education Services (ACSES), where she has served as chair since 2018.

“It was recognized that not every student will be successful if they aren’t accommodated with respect to their specific need,” said Federico. “How are you going to let a student run a race if he’s limping? You have to provide support. We don’t necessarily expect the student to finish first, but the mere fact of finishing the race is an achievement itself. We try to figure out how to help these students finish the race and be successful in this already competitive world.”

ACSES brings together parents, teachers, school administrators and support staff, among others, for meetings once every two months. The parents sitting on the board form the majority and are selected by the Executive Committee for a two-year term from applications submitted by interested parents. They must have a child with “physical or learning disabilities, social maladjustments [or] other difficulties which require special needs,” as described on the ACSES webpage.

“We want a perspective from every type of disability, from autism to Down syndrome and hearing impairment,” said Federico. “We try to ensure that the committee is well-rounded, and that we cover all our bases.”

ACSES works in close collaboration with the Student Services department. Parents offer their first-hand accounts of their child’s struggles and their concerns, with the school board offering support and answering questions along the way. In addition to the bi-monthly meetings, workshops are also arranged through Student Services to apprise parents of important issues and EMSB programs.

“The EMSB professionals are working hard to help our students,” she said, “and it is important for them to work in collaboration with the parents who know first-hand what it is like to raise a child with special needs. They rely on our experience to better understand the needs of our children.”

The committee advises the school board on policy and the allocation of financial resources for educational services to students with special needs. Improvements to individualized education plans are also heavily discussed. The committee will also periodically meet with other like groups from school boards across the province to share information and strategies.

Federico is proud to see her advocacy rubbing off on her children.

“I needed my children to learn how to advocate for themselves in order for them to be able to advocate for their future children or others,” she said. “It’s about accepting and acknowledging their challenges, not using it as a crutch, but rather as their reason to persevere.”

ACSES was established in October 1998 as part of the law within the Quebec Education Act requiring school boards to establish an advisory committee on services for students with special needs. ■



by *Nick Katalifos*

Equity, diversity, inclusion – priorities at the EMSB

Coming up on just over a year as director general of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), I am always impressed by the ways our school staff and administrations strive to make all students feel like they belong.

We count among ourselves people with different abilities, of a different race and from diverse cultural backgrounds, gender and sexual orientations, and religions.

Equity, diversity, inclusion – belonging. These are the ideals that we embrace and embody at the EMSB. This past January, we opened the doors to six of our schools to show the public how we do it.

There are so many amazing examples of activities and events that bring people together in our schools. Some include dance performances showcasing a particular culture, field trips to areas of historical importance in the Indigenous community, guest speakers sharing personal experiences, and screenings of films and readings. Each initiative is designed to encourage dialogue amongst students, where, guided by their teachers, they are sensitized to the importance of creating and sustaining a more inclusive environment.

Our libraries are populating shelves with more books by authors from diverse backgrounds, and covering more topics in gender identity and expression, race and religion. Our youngest students should be able to borrow picture books with all kinds of people in them – they should see themselves. Our oldest students should have access to resources that cover a diverse range of topics.

Several departments – Student Services, which includes the Spiritual and Community Animation Service, and Educational Services, which includes our library services and Ethics and Religious Culture department – work together throughout the year to bring in voices from across the community to speak to students about something that may be familiar to some and brand new to others. It's this way we encourage inquiry, openness and dialogue.

I was happy we announced the EMSB Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee during our diversity and inclusion campaign in January. The committee is made up of managers and board members with a specific mandate to provide clear guidelines for fostering and promoting a welcoming and inclusive school environment.

Promoting health and wellness is a priority. The pandemic has made it even more so. As we get through it, we continue to refine our ways of improving mental health care for all those in our school communities. (See article on p. 14 to learn more about our Student Services department's response during this time.) ■

Nick Katalifos is the director general of the English Montreal School Board, board member of the Transforming Autism Care Consortium and special advisor to Inspirations.



by *Joanne Charron*

There's a hack for that: Hackability to launch soon

Are you constantly adapting the world around your handicapped loved one to meet their needs? Are you always “MacGyvering” creative, quick solutions when you are in a bind? If so, you are not alone. I have spent over 25 years doing the same, and now I want to share a few of my solutions with you and learn about yours.

If you simply cannot wait for an appointment with the occupational or physical therapist, or speech-language pathologist for a solution to a complex issue, I have good news! Whether you have an issue with feeding, positioning, comfort, dressing, recreation or a multitude of other areas in your loved one's life, there is always a hack to help you out.

Here are some examples:

Hack #1: Insta-boot

If your loved one has issues wearing boots because their foot is hyperextended all the time or deformed, insert an insulated boot liner into an extra-large insulated sock.

Voilà! You have an instant boot that is soft and easy to put on.

Hack #2: Insta-snow pants

Snow pants for wheelchair users is complicated. They are cumbersome to put on, and the seatbelt often has to be adjusted. And when you reach your destination, you have to transfer your loved one to remove them. I use leg warmers instead. Put them over their pants so that you can just pull them off when you have arrived without having to take your child out of their wheelchair. You can also use thigh-high socks under their pants.

These types of hacks can be lifesavers. They are so valuable that we like to share them with our friends, tell them what's worked in a pinch and try out theirs.

To facilitate this exchange, my son and I decided to take it to the next level. We are excited to introduce Hackability, a forum where we can all share our hacks, crazy ideas, and where we can search for

solutions. As a social media initiative, Hackability will touch on all facets of life, from how to adapt food, toys, your home or other areas for wheelchair users to ways of addressing comfort, pressure sores, dressing for all seasons, wheelchair accessories and more, such as how to prepare for a hospital stay. We'll also suggest what communication and smart products are available for your home and show you double-duty products, such as the legwarmers and insulated socks, we used to address a need and solve a problem. All our hacks will include a link to the products we used and where to get them. ■

Look out for Hackability, launching soon on social media. (We will announce it on the Inspirations Facebook page.) We want you to be part of the community and would love for you to share your favourite hacks with us in the meantime at hackability.ca@gmail.com.

Joanne Charron is the president of The C.A.R.E. Centre and special advisor to Inspirations. Contact her at charronjoanne@gmail.com.



Comfy slipper socks can be used as mittens or as an “insta-boot” in the winter.



by
Jennifer Maccarone

Needs before politics

Every year, April 2 is World Autism Awareness Day. For some, it is just another day, but for thousands of families like mine, autism is a part of our lives, 365 days a year.

As a mom to two young adults on the spectrum, I can attest to the fact that my children have changed my life and have made me a better person and a better parent, have given me a stronger voice and resilience I didn't know I had. And while their challenges continue, I am proud of their success. But there are so many things I wish I knew way back when they received their diagnoses.

I wish I knew then that I wasn't alone and that it didn't matter what anyone thinks (ice cream is acceptable for dinner; it's okay to hide from the world in your garage; TV can save your life). I wish I knew then that when things were at their worst, they would get better. I wish I knew that it was okay to feel sad, jealous, angry, frustrated and overwhelmed. I wish I knew how hard it was going to be to get and keep a spot in daycare, and that school for them meant a full-time job for me. I wish I knew that every transition required meticulous planning and support. I wish I knew in advance

that when they turned 18, they would lose their pediatrician, their government subsidies and that their access to support programs would end.

Helping and supporting my kids meant I became involved everywhere I could: School, organizations, community groups and more, with a view to providing opportunities to increase understanding and acceptance of autistic people.

In October 2018, I was elected as the MNA for Westmount-Saint-Louis and became the first spokesperson for autistic people in the Quebec National Assembly. Since then, I have been tirelessly striving to change the lack of resources and support for families with children and adults on the autism spectrum.

To date, I have formally proposed six different mandate initiatives to the government – all of which the CAQ voted against. I asked them to study and find solutions for: the high number of students with special needs who are forced to homeschool, or who do not have access to any educational support; the lack of access to daycare for children with handicaps; the transition from youth to adult; and inclusion in the workplace.

Every time the government voted against my suggestions, they refused to acknowledge the reality of these families and offer a helping hand. Beyond the distress this causes, I am deeply concerned that politics come before the needs of those who are vulnerable.

Today if I had a message for the Premier, it would be that autistic people and their families don't just need a speech during autism month, that I know things need to change, and that we can only do it together. Our political parties and values may be different, but our goal should be the same.

Like my kids, it may take me longer to achieve my goal, but I will not give up, and for the sake of all those whose voices we cannot hear, we need to always strive to get there. Autistic people and their families need you, and it's not too late to act. ■

Jennifer Maccarone is the MNA for Westmount-Saint-Louis and the Official Opposition Critic for Diversity and Inclusion, Families, Social Solidarity, the Fight Against Poverty, LGBTQ2 and for Persons Living with a Disability or with Autism Spectrum Disorder. Contact jennifer.maccarone.wsl@assnat.qc.ca or 514.395.2929.



by
Steven Atme

Cheers to **10** Years The never-ending journey is key!

On February 12, I celebrated the 10th anniversary of my "Special People Have Dreams" speaking tour. It's hard to believe that I was an 18-year-old kid when I first thought, "I'm going to speak for everyone with disabilities and their families in front of a thousand people at St. Joseph's Oratory and play original compositions on an organ." No, I couldn't believe it then, and now here we are, 10 years later.

I'm in complete awe that it has come this far. When I share my speech, I am overwhelmed with joy seeing each individual smile, listening to their stories and seeing abilities and dreams come true. That is the greatest reward.

To celebrate this milestone, I started planning a huge speaking tour for 2022. While planning it, the craziest thing happened: I received the Simon Chang Difference

Maker Award for Fall 2021/Winter 2022! I was honoured.

I met Simon Chang on a videoconference call in September and then, when the pandemic allowed some time later, in person at his studio on Chabanel St., along with my parents. It was amazing. We exchanged a lot of whimsical energy and endless conversation. Simon mentioned that in his past, others discouraged him from being himself and becoming a fashion designer. We understood one another. The Simon Chang team was most interested in having me share my message with school staff in the Greater Montreal and surrounding areas. That was when we decided to collaborate, along with the support of *Inspirations*, to organize the 10th anniversary speaking tour.

In my 10 speaking engagements within the English Montreal School Board and the

Lester B. Pearson School Board, I reminded staff that everyone has a dream and to never give up on students, to keep searching for ways to reach them and help them discover what inspires them.

I also spoke to students at other schools, which I arranged as part of my tour. Some sessions were in-person, some were virtual. Either way, we continuously kept our spirits high and made the magic happen. For example, when I spoke to students at Willingdon Elementary School in December 2021, two children asked me, "Are you an angel?" I replied, "That depends. What are you looking for?" They responded, "Can you grant us a wish?" I said, "Ask me anything. Give me your wish, and I'll make it happen." Their wish was to feel included, spread good deeds to others and to be shining stars.

Throughout the past decade, I have realized that "Special People Have Dreams" is for everyone. It is for people who need a fresh start from obstacles faced in their personal lives, such as mental health, race and background. Together, we can create solutions that become resolutions, leading to fulfilling goals, hopes and dreams. A brighter, healthier beginning. During this celebratory year and forever more, let us make all special people's wishes come true, helping them start their journeys and create never-ending stories. The never-ending journey is key! ■

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. Contact Steven at atmepianosphd@hotmail.com.

Le rôle social actif, fiction ou réalité?

par *Stephan Marcoux*

L'expression « rôle social actif » est de plus en plus répandue, mais est-elle vraiment comprise? J'aimerais ici partager avec vous ma définition du rôle social actif. En premier lieu, laissez-moi vous expliquer le concept de l'organisme Pleins Rayons que j'ai fondé il y a 6 ans dans le but de faire vivre des situations hautement inclusives à des personnes vivant avec une déficience intellectuelle ou le spectre de l'autisme. Par l'entremise de 18 projets d'économie sociale qui ont tous un impact direct dans la communauté, les apprentis de Pleins Rayons sont à même de découvrir la place importante qu'ils peuvent se tailler au sein de la communauté et comment se définir comme citoyen à part entière par leurs actions concrètes dans plusieurs sphères de la vie communautaire.

Voici quelques exemples de projet qui confèrent à ces belles personnes un rôle social actif et de qualité. Ces projets ont également pour effet d'accroître la sensibilisation au sein de la communauté. Le service de brigade aidante est composé de 4 apprentis et d'un éducateur qui aident des personnes âgées à accomplir des tâches extérieures

dans le but de maintenir leur autonomie à domicile et de briser leur isolement.

Qui plus est, il importe de mentionner que les apprentis acquièrent des habiletés socioprofessionnelles susceptibles d'être transposables éventuellement en situation de travail réel, et ce, grâce à l'embauche inclusive, bien entendu! Le projet de reconditionnement de vélos a lui aussi des répercussions remarquables dans la communauté. Plus de 850 vélos ont été donnés à des jeunes défavorisés au cours des 6 dernières années. C'est magique de voir les apprentis se rendre sur place pour offrir un vélo à un jeune dans le besoin. Ces moments créés sont de la sensibilisation à l'état pur!

Les exemples sont nombreux, mais je souhaite souligner l'audace dont il faut faire preuve pour amener ces belles personnes à un niveau de participation sociale supérieur. Le secret de leur évolution sous-entend un changement de statut dans la société où la personne qui reçoit des services devient la personne aidante dans sa collectivité afin de développer une implication citoyenne via l'entraide communautaire. Selon moi, la recette gagnante passe par le rôle social actif! Ce rôle permet



La brigade aidante à pied d'œuvre chez un horticulteur de Sutton le 28 octobre dernier.
Photo : Mikael Theimer

de développer la confiance, l'estime de soi et d'apprendre à faire des choix pour soi-même, en plus d'occuper, une fois pour toutes, une place active au sein de la société! Vive l'inclusion! ■

Stephan Marcoux est le fondateur de Pleins Rayons et directeur général par intérim de la Société québécoise de la déficience intellectuelle.

La représentation des personnes en situation de handicap dans les médias

par *Amélie Tremblay*

Quelle est la représentation des personnes en situation de handicap dans les productions médiatiques au Québec? C'est la question que soulève la recherche du docteur Mouloud Boukala, professeur à l'École des médias de l'Université du Québec à Montréal. Lors d'un midi-conférence présenté par le CRISPESH, le chercheur a pris le temps d'expliquer la pertinence d'un tel processus de recherche et de partager ses découvertes jusqu'à maintenant. En comptabilisant plus de 80 entrées, l'équipe de recherche se penche sur la représentation de 1980 à 2020 des personnes en situation de handicap dans les médias au Québec en prenant en considération de nombreux facteurs

comme le genre, l'orientation sexuelle, la profession exercée, la situation de handicap feinte ou réelle, etc.

L'hypothèse initiale veut que l'on tende à polariser l'image de la personne handicapée dans les représentations médiatiques. D'un côté, on présente la personne en situation de handicap comme une victime, un être faible et fragile qui a besoin de protection. On la placera alors dans une situation socio-économique précaire, lui donnera des attributs liés à la maladie et tendra grandement vers le misérabilisme. De l'autre côté, on représente la personne en situation de handicap comme un superhéros plus grand que nature. On aura

alors droit à un personnage fort, solide, résilient, qui traverse les épreuves avec courage. La personne représentée sera alors dans une position socio-économique supérieure à la moyenne ou aura des forces physiques qui viennent « compenser » son handicap. Les deux images sont en opposition et bien peu de personnes en situation de handicap semblent se trouver entre les deux sphères. Ces représentations parlent de l'image que la société pose sur les personnes en situation de handicap et soulèvent de nombreuses questions sur l'inclusion.

Un autre enjeu de représentativité se retrouve dans la représentation du handicap en lui-même. Nombre de

productions médiatiques présentent des personnes qui feignent le handicap plutôt que des artistes qui vivent réellement avec un handicap. Encore une fois, qu'est-ce qui explique une telle représentation feinte alors que des artistes en situation de handicap existent?

La recherche du docteur Boukala a assurément sa raison d'être. La représentation des personnes handicapées dans les médias a changé dans les 40 dernières années, mais le chemin à parcourir est encore long. Une étude sur le sujet permet de jeter un regard sur le chemin parcouru pour apprendre et faire mieux dans le futur. ■



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Galileo film fest features stop motion animation

by Vera Tronca, Lisa Trotto and Tima Assi

Social Integration Services (SIS) students at Galileo Adult Education Centre participated in their second annual SIS film festival on January 27. The popularity of the iBelong Digital Storytelling project last year led teachers Lisa Trotto and Vera Tronca to organize another digital project this year, this time using stop motion animation.

Students worked diligently on their videos with Jessie Curell, executive director of Hands On Media Education, who has been their partner and mentor. Galileo is the only adult centre that has taken part in this project across Quebec, principal Martina Schiavone was proud to share.

The stop motion animation project, above all else, fostered collaboration and teamwork, and allowed students to immerse

themselves into a world of creativity through a dynamic and stimulating digital and hands-on learning experience.

With Curell's weekly virtual guidance, students learned how to use Stop Motion Studio Pro App, digital editing techniques, storyboard creation, photography, original music creation, sound effects, voice and sound altering, and copyright-free material.

They learned the clay modeling process, changing up the models for each storyline. Clay modeling is a therapeutic and fun way to help students stay focused and build their self-esteem. It promotes sensory development as it offers both a tactile and visual learning experience. The result was five one-minute stop motion animation videos created over the course of five weeks. They were screened at the Galileo Film Festival. ■

Vera Tronca and Lisa Trotto are SIS teachers at Galileo Adult Education Centre. Tima Assi is an intern.



Galileo SIS students and staff celebrate at their film festival on January 27. Photos: Lucrezia Termini



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Galileo's new student art gallery

Galileo's student-artists are at it again as they embark on beautifying the centre's second-floor passageway. They are reinventing the area and transforming it into a viewing gallery with artwork created by students. It will also become a more welcoming area for students to sit, relax and talk about the art surrounding them.

The project's aim is to embellish the hallway with student artwork and enhance their motor skills during the creative process. It encompasses several segments:

The Dreamy Corner: Six canvases with 3D effects.

The Artwork Space: 15 circular wooden canvases inspired by nature and Spring. Students used techniques that included merging colours and creating colourful backgrounds and combining canvases using wooden sticks and inserting beads to unite aesthetic and sensory benefits.

The Mosaic Collection: Mosaic tiles make up a montage of diverse canvases.

The Abstract Collection: Using art therapy and abstract painting techniques to create colourful canvases.

-V. T., L. T. and T. A.



Visit Galileo's YouTube channel to view the Galileo SIS Film Festival: <https://bit.ly/3s851d8>. See the students in action: <https://bit.ly/3g5OqAT>, and watch the students' stop motion animation videos: <https://bit.ly/3ILB2OH>.

Wagar graphic design program offers viable career path

by *David P. Stein*

A graphic design program at Wagar's Adult Education Centre of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) in Côte Saint-Luc, run by Elias Tanbe, has students motivated in the classroom like never before.

Originally from Lebanon, Tanbe has been at the EMSB for more than five years after working and studying in Algeria, Lebanon, Dubai, the United States, among other countries around the world including Africa. Tanbe's background in graphic design includes more than 15 years of experience.

"Wagar eventually decided to add the computer graphics program, which I offered, as part of their Sociovocational Integration Services program. Once it was accepted, I didn't know what to expect. I worked before with people on the spectrum, but it was more on the artistic side, and less in terms of graphic design," said Tanbe, who is currently working on a Master's degree in

Education, to go along with four other academic degrees and certificates in a variety of disciplines.

Since this is the first program of its kind at Wagar, there were some uncertainties about how the students would receive it, or how much interest there would even be.

One of Tanbe's students, Michel Rivard, said, "My favourite part of this program would have to be character design as it's used in many ways, especially today with modern technology and scanning equipment. I am proud of my work on different characters whether it's writing details about what they can do or bringing them to life with colour and details."

"I've learned a lot of different skills in the Adobe suite of programs, such as Adobe Photoshop and Adobe Illustrator. My favourite part is being in school learning the different softwares, and I'm most proud of making the fire evacuation plan for our school," said classmate Zachary Silas-Gagnon.



Wagar graphic design students pose for a photo in their classroom on April 25. Photo: Elias Tanbe

Similarly, students like Nathan Stacey, William Brinckman-Smith and Allan Pazos enjoy the applicability of the skills they're learning to showcase their creativity.

"This is what I want to do for a living," said Stacey. "Growing up, my father was my biggest influence. He worked with computers, and it's been my calling from age 10. I hope to use the skills I've developed to hold on to a job and make a name for myself and give my skills the true test of making me enough money to move out and live on my own."

"I hope to create my own original pieces of graphic art even if they are simple and hope to find some part-time work [so] that I can apply what I've learned," echoed Brinckman-Smith.

Tanbe recognizes the opportunity for his students to use technology as a means for encouraging artistic creativity, but he also understands the economy's demand for skilled graphic designers who are trained to use the industry's most up to date software.

Most importantly however, he acknowledges that his graphic design program is an avenue for students with different learning styles to work at their own pace, but also as

part of a team that promotes diversity and inclusion.

"The way I see the classroom is more like a graphic design agency and less like a traditional classroom, even by the way the tables are set up," Tanbe explained.

"This way the students can communicate with each other. It's like community-building in a way. We always try to help our students build bridges with others, and this graphic design program is helping us accomplish that mission." ■

Teaching pre-work skills within a rehabilitative setting empowers students

by *Wendy Singer*

This school year, students attending the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton (PEL) schools of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) participated in a project to create a school-based model of teaching work skills to students with significant and multiple disabilities within a rehabilitative framework.

Led by Sarah Lynch, special education consultant and Claudia De Luca, occupational therapist, both at the EMSB, the project included students aged 13 to 21 in two high school classes – one at Mackay and one at PEL – and the Mackay Satellite class at Westmount

High School, also known as "Leaders on Wheels." Students aged 13 were included so they could begin developing job-related skills such as positive attitude towards work, self-advocacy, responsibility, teamwork, conflict resolution and problem-solving at an early age.

Lynch explained that these students don't have the same opportunities as others. Some present with physical and/or intellectual disabilities, some with accompanying sensory impairments in hearing or vision. "We worked with the rehabilitation teams so that students could participate physically.

▶ *Continued on p. 31*

Thank you!

Inspirations is proud to partner with Elias Tanbe's graphic design class. Students have designed some of the pages and ads in this edition, as well as flyers that advertise our awards.

Thank you, Wagar students, for your creative work!

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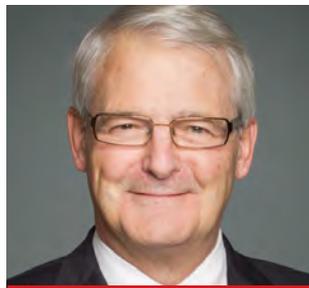
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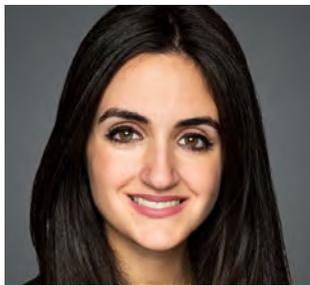
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Cet âge est essentiel pour engager et développer les voies neuronales du cerveau qui sont si importantes pour le langage parlé. Les familles reçoivent un accompagnement hebdomadaire — à domicile ou à la garderie — afin de soutenir le développement de l'écoute et du langage parlé auprès de leur enfant. Grâce à l'utilisation de technologies auditives, tels que les appareils auditifs ou les implants cochléaires, et avec une stimulation auditive intense, les capacités de votre enfant s'épanouiront.

Early Intervention / Ages 0 – 3

This age is key to engage and develop the brain's neural pathways that are so important to spoken language. Families are coached weekly — in their home or at daycare — on how to help their child listen and speak. With the use of hearing technology, such as hearing aids or cochlear implants, and intensive auditory stimulation your child's capacity will bloom.

Précolaire / 3 à 5 ans

Votre enfant jouera et apprendra avec des camarades entendants dans un cadre préscolaire naturel et dynamique. Nous proposons des séances individuelles quotidiennes qui se concentrent sur le développement de l'écoute et du langage parlé. Nous assurons également un suivi étroit de la technologie auditive de votre enfant. Les frères et sœurs sont les bienvenus.

Preschool / Ages 3- 5

Your child will play and learn with hearing peers in a natural and vibrant preschool setting. We provide daily one-on-one sessions that focus on developing listening and spoken language skills. We also provide close monitoring of your child's hearing technology. Siblings welcome.

École primaire / de la 1re à la 6e année

Nos petites classes suivent le programme scolaire québécois avec des spécialistes en français, en musique et en activité physique, avec un accent particulier sur l'apprentissage de la lecture. Chaque élève bénéficie d'un plan d'intervention individuel répondant à ses besoins spécifiques. Nous continuons de développer les capacités d'écoute et de langage parlé de votre enfant tout en optimisant sa technologie auditive. Notre objectif est de combler l'écart linguistique afin de préparer votre enfant à rejoindre le milieu scolaire régulier.

Elementary school / Grades 1 – 6

Our small classes follow the Quebec curriculum, and include French, music and gym, with an extra emphasis on literacy. Each student has an individualized education plan (IEP) to address their specific needs. We continue to develop your child's listening and spoken language skills while optimizing their hearing technology. Our goal is to close the language gap in preparation for your child to join the mainstream.

Soutien aux élèves en vue de leur intégration en milieu scolaire régulier

Lorsque le moment sera venu, nous aiderons votre enfant à intégrer son école de quartier. Nous nous rendons actuellement chaque semaine dans plus de 100 écoles, anglophones et francophones, pour soutenir plus de 150 élèves présentant une déficience auditive. Nous travaillons en partenariat avec l'équipe-école pour permettre à votre enfant d'apprendre aux côtés de ses camarades.

Student support for mainstream schooling

When the time is right, we'll help your child integrate into your community school. We currently visit over 100 schools, English and French, each week to provide support to over 150 students with hearing loss. We work in partnership with the school team to ensure your child learns alongside their peers.

Contactez-nous pour discuter des besoins de votre enfant. Nous nous ferons un plaisir de vous fournir de plus amples informations sur nos programmes et services. Pour découvrir notre histoire et obtenir plus d'information sur l'approche auditive-verbale, veuillez visiter notre site Web.

Contact us to discuss your child's needs. It will be our pleasure to provide further information on our programs and services. For additional information on auditory-verbal education and our history, please visit our website.

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Place Cartier Adult Centre

Programs & Resources

- Endeavour Social Integration
- Thrive SVI
(Semi-Skilled Trade)
- Delta Alternative Program
- SOS Resource Centre



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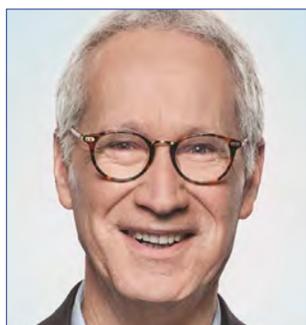
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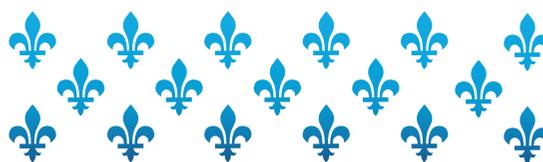
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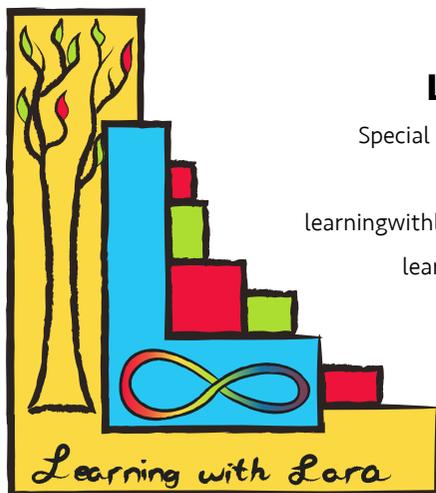


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Mindful seeing invites us to look outward

by *Danika Swanson*

Spring is in the air and unfolding all around us! It is the perfect season to introduce the practice of mindful seeing. In past editions, we practiced paying attention to sound, breath, body and thoughts. Now we are going to practice paying attention to what we can see with our eyes.

While most mindfulness practices invite us to look inward, the practice of mindful seeing asks us to look outward, to notice and be present with what is all around us. In mindfulness practices, especially when we're getting started and for kids, it is helpful to have something on which to focus our attention. This can be the breath, a word or external stimuli. Whatever we choose as our "anchor," it gives us something to return to when we notice our mind wandering.

Like all mindfulness practices, practicing mindful seeing can improve attention, self-regulation and well-being. But this specific practice, in its invitation to slow down and be mindful of our surroundings, helps

hone the skills of observation, taps into children's natural curiosity and encourages greater appreciation and awareness of what is around us.

If you guide your children in this practice, you can offer them vocabulary to describe things they notice and prompt them to pay attention to colour, movement, texture, shape, size, etc.

Practice:

- Settle into your mindful body.
- Keeping your body still, slowly move your head to look around the room. Move slowly and look carefully.
- Observe as many details as you can. Can you notice something you haven't noticed before?
- Look for about one minute. (You can keep your focus broad or narrow in on a specific object).
- When your mind wanders, gently bring your attention back to seeing.
- Close with one mindful breath.



Cedarcrest Elementary School students enjoy a moment of mindfulness on March 28.
Photo: Ibrahim Abou Arab

- How does it feel to look around the room carefully, noticing what is around you? What did you notice? How might mindful seeing be helpful for you?

Alternative ideas:

- Try doing this at different times of day or over the course of a few days or weeks. What remained the same, what changed? What did you notice?
- For children who benefit from more concrete directions, have them pick an object to focus on, asking them to notice as much detail about that object as they can (size, shape, texture, patterns, colour, etc.) What can they notice when they really focus on an object?
- Children who need to move can try this while walking mindfully.
- With younger kids, you can reverse the directions, like a game of "Eye Spy." For example: "Name something blue. Name

Resources for mindful seeing

Audio: Guided Meditations for Children: Mindful Seeing:
<https://annakaharris.com/mindful-seeing/> (3:45 and 4:48)

Video: Bubble Bounce! Mindfulness for Children (Mindful Looking):
<https://youtu.be/UEuFi9PxKuo> (4:02)

something smooth. Name something round. Find something you hadn't noticed before." ■

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 elementary and secondary school students.

Teaching pre-work skills

◀ *Continued from p. 23*

We asked, 'When someone doesn't have control over their body's movements, how can we make this a worthwhile learning experience?' We worked with the strengths of the teachers and the interests of the students."

Rehabilitation professionals consulted were from Programme de Réadaptation dans les Écoles Spécialisées at the Centre de Réadaptation Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay, CIUSSS Centre Ouest de l'Île de Montréal.

Lynch, De Luca and Andrea Prupas, assistive technology consultant with the EMSB, introduced a "cookies in a jar" project to Leaders on Wheels teacher Rosemarie Sondola and her students. The Leaders have been making and selling spice rubs

and sauces since 2014 and donating proceeds from sales to the Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation. Together, they chose products, determined the quantities needed and shopped. "We were able to give the students more ownership over their learning," said Lynch. "They got involved in the production and the business sides." Workstations were evaluated to ensure that students could work comfortably and efficiently.

Students learned how to create and send an order form using Google Forms, and monitor and track sales. "The project brought our Leaders on Wheels fundraising initiative to a new technological level," said Sondola. "It was a great learning experience

and one that we will duplicate for all our fundraising initiatives."

One PEL class is creating a cookbook filled with recipes that they learned. The book will include braille and be partly tactile. "The students have low or no vision, and once they are prepared, they can mix, pour and reach," said Lynch. "The skills the students learn provide them with independence. The cookbook will show families what their children are learning and what they are capable of doing."

Teacher Beata Strzyz's senior class at Mackay painted and decorated a selection of cards. Once completed, each artist added



Jordan Paquette, left, and Nicholas Gagné prepare to fill cookie jars with dry ingredients at the Mackay Centre's Satellite Class at Westmount High School in January 2022.
Photo: Claudia De Luca

their own signature. "We are extremely proud of the final look of our abstract artwork," said Strzyz. Proceeds of card sales were donated to the C.A.R.E. Centre. ■

The ABCs of inclusivity: Optimizing accessibility at Place Cartier

by *Stephanie Blanchfield, Kira Bratton, Casey Finn-Lefsrud, Gail Gagnon and Matthew Kennedy*

Place Cartier Adult Education Centre, part of the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB), offers a variety of specialized, inclusive and alternative programs at two accessible campuses on the West Island. Just like our students, our staff is committed to lifelong learning, and book clubs have always been an important way to connect outside of school hours. Last year, our Antiracism Book Club (or the “ABC” as we called it) explored how we could share what we learned from our community and expand our discussions beyond antiracism. We submitted a proposal for a Leadership Committee for English Education in Quebec Professional Development and Innovation Grant.

The purpose of our project, “Building an Inclusive Community by Leading from the Middle,” was to organize a series of professional development days dedicated to examining how to establish a school

culture grounded in shared values that promote caring and inclusion. The content and themes dovetailed nicely with similar initiatives at LBPSB, including the work of the Taskforce on Equity and Inclusion. Day 1 introduced inclusivity in general, with particular attention to antiracism, gender and ableism. Day 2 focused on disability and accessibility. The focus of Day 3 was designed around culturally responsive pedagogy, also looking at consolidating our growing understanding of inclusivity and reaffirming our commitment to accessibility in the future.

Though we have hosted workshops on strategies for teaching neurodivergent students in the past, we have never dedicated a full day of training to understanding disability and exploring accessibility. We had the pleasure of welcoming Aimee Louw, a journalist, author, feminist and disability consultant, whose workshop reframed our



Three of the 15 categories in Place Cartier's choiceboard. Photo: Place Cartier

understanding of disability, challenged us to question stereotypes and confront ableism, highlighted the necessity of universal design, and stressed the importance of being proactive rather than reactive. With a new perspective, we then turned inward to showcase, review and discuss the various programs offered at Place Cartier and the inclusive strategies we use daily in our classrooms.

Our staff also explored a digital “choiceboard” of resources on various themes, such as accessibility, autism spectrum disorder and executive function. Over the course of the year, our choiceboard has grown to include 15 thematic tiles.

Place Cartier is a proud team that constantly strives to meet the learning needs of our wonderful students. This year's project has demonstrated how far we've come as an inclusive adult education centre but has also served as a reminder that this important work is never done. ■

Stephanie Blanchfield is a sociovocational integration teacher; Kira Bratton is a social integration teacher; Casey Finn-Lefsrud is a readaptation officer; and Gail Gagnon is a pedagogical consultant at Place Cartier; and Matthew Kennedy is a consultant for social participation and sociovocational integration at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

Intergenerational story time engages readers of all ages

by *Nancy Battet*

The LaSalle Action Centre, which is associated with the Pearson Adult Career Centre (PACC) of the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB), is a social integration program that provides courses for adults in LaSalle who have physical and intellectual challenges.

Denise Currie has taught at the centre for several years now and wanted her students to experience the idea of bringing the “entrepreneurial spirit” to her classroom. In September 2019, she took part in a LBPSB workshop, where she learned that entrepreneurship is not always about starting a business. It is also about “social entrepreneurship,” where students are encouraged to brainstorm ideas on a passion they may have or a need they identify in their community.

She learned that students can take action on solving a particular need, develop a product, create a service or organize an event.

After discussions with her students, they came up with the idea of offering a service which would be to read to younger elementary students in the LaSalle area through an online platform. The Action Centre was taking action! Collaboration was achieved with LBPSB elementary school, LaSalle Elementary Junior, with teacher Karen LaPorte and her second-grade students.

Ms. Laporte and her students were thrilled when they heard they would be the recipients of the “storytime service” by Action Centre students, and through brainstorming with their teacher they came up with an entrepreneurial project of their own! They decided to organize a “meet and greet” for their Action Centre mentors prior to the story time activities. During this online event, students prepared a PowerPoint presentation to introduce themselves and to showcase all the wonderful things they do and learn in their classroom. This event took place on February 17.



Students at the LaSalle Action Centre were the regional winners of OSEntreprenre Challenge 2022 in the category of Adult Education. They are seen here proudly displaying their winning stickers in May. Photo courtesy of the Action Centre

► *Continued on p. 33*

ASC names Parent as this year's ambassador

by *Tania Piperni*

Rachelle Parent is a kind-hearted 24-year-old woman, an advocate for people on the autism spectrum and this year's ambassador for the Autism Speaks Canada Montreal Walk.

Parent was diagnosed with autism at the age of 17. She attends an adult education school in the West Island, where she continues to enhance her social skills and important life skills such as budgeting and balancing mental and physical health. She enjoys making oral presentations and incorporates interesting photos. Parent likes to learn languages and is almost fluent in American Sign Language (ASL), which she learned so that she could communicate with her school friend who only uses ASL. She hopes to work at the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf to help teach ASL to young children. She also enjoys baking, cooking, jewellery making, piano playing, card making, crocheting and drawing.

Parent has attended the Montreal walks for six years and enjoys the planned activi-

ties, seeing people like herself and talking to others. This year she sold bracelets at school during World Autism Month in April and is looking forward to seeing her family and friends that will be coming out to the walk to support her in her new role.

"Being the ambassador means a lot to me. I feel proud to have been chosen and to be a role model to help spread awareness," said Parent, seeing this as an opportunity to take on a leadership role to raise awareness. It is also a new journey for her to increase social skills, express herself more, and provide an experience for her to shine.

Parent's message to others with autism is "Take it one day at a time. Make sure you set goals and be proud of yourself after. I had many challenges and struggles, sometimes my anxiety takes over me but going for a walk and music help. Sometimes it is challenging but I try to always think positively. Now people understand me and accept me for who I am," she said.

When she found out she was autistic, she wanted to understand it more and sought help from her parents, Martin Parent and



Rachelle Parent is surrounded by her parents, Martin Parent and Sylvia Wong, in their backyard on June 13, 2021 for last year's Autism Speaks Canada Virtual Walk Day. Photo courtesy of Sylvia Wong

Sylvia Wong. Now she is an advocate for herself as well as for others. As her father explained, "Knowing she has autism provides a framework for what her journey has been like and what it will continue to be."

Autism Speaks Canada has helped the Parent family understand the journey of an autistic person and nurture Parent's tremendous gifts, and provided a positive

space on an ongoing basis. Rachelle Parent is honoured to be this year's ambassador at the Montreal Walk. ■

The Autism Speaks Canada Montreal Walk will take place on June 12, 2022 in the Dawson College Courtyard. Register at www.ascWalk.ca.

Tania Piperni, M.Ed is an autism spectrum disorder consultant at the English Montreal School Board.

◀ *Continued from p. 32*

Intergenerational story time

"COVID quarantine hit when these children were in kindergarten, so [for] almost their entire school experience they've lived in a "bubble," said Grade 2 teacher Ms. Laporte. "Developing this connection with the Lasalle Action Centre has been really special for my students; they were extremely motivated to present their projects to adults outside of their school. It sparked creativity and teamwork. They also loved hearing stories from our new friends at the Action Centre."

The first of the storytelling activities took place via videoconference on February 24, when Action Centre students read both French and English stories to the children.

Action Centre teacher Denise Currie is very inspired by this new partnership with her students and LaSalle Elementary Junior. "This cross-generational project of creating a story time for Grade 2 students has empowered this community of adult learners and recognizes the contribution of people with physical and intellectual disabilities," she said.

Her students agreed. "I like making a difference in the perception that children might have about people who are physically challenged. Reading to a Grade 2 class was a positive experience," said Action Centre student Melissa Lemilen. Said Laura Wishart, "I like working with children, and it boosted my confidence to read to them."

Natasha Zielinski agreed and said, "I learned not to be shy reading to children."

More activities were being organized for the students. The Action Centre mentors had planned to read to Laporte's second graders once again at the end of April. As well, Denise Currie and her Action Centre students plan to invite their younger buddies in person to the Action Centre in June. There may even be a food truck!

The project has won the regional level for the OSEntreprene Challenge 2022 in the category of Adult Education. ■

Nancy Battet is a pedagogical consultant at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

My Autism Guide

Autism Speaks Canada launched My Autism Guide (MAG), a free online tool designed for autistic Canadians, caregivers and members of the autism community to access reliable information and resources. One can find resources specific to age, location and interests; locate community events; access service providers; and connect with community forums. Visit MAG at www.myautismguide.ca.

Autism Response Team

Autism Speaks Canada offers an Autism Response Team (ART), a free information line for the autism community. Specially trained team members can provide personalized information to people with autism, their families and caretakers regarding finding tools, resources, services and supports within the community. They are available from 9 am to 5 pm at 1-888-362-6227 or support@autismspeaks.ca.



by *Mike Cohen*

Report from Parliament Hill

Qualtrough's experience a good fit for disability, inclusion file

When Prime Minister Justin Trudeau handed out his cabinet posts last fall, the Honourable Carla Qualtrough was reappointed as Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion – a post she has held since 2019.

"I was born legally blind and only have 10 percent corrected vision," Qualtrough has explained in interviews. "The reality is that I was born into a world that wasn't built for me, one where my needs were not taken into account, one that I would have to learn to constantly adapt to, one where people were going to make assumptions about what I could and couldn't do my entire life."

"I was introduced to the world of Paralympic sport, and my life was forever changed, both in the pool and in the way that I looked at the world. I travelled the world and was exposed to incredible demonstrations of ability and incredible discrimination. By the time I swam varsity for uOttawa in the lead-up to the [1992] Barcelona Paralympic Games, I'd been swimming up to 11 times a week for 10 years."

As an athlete, Qualtrough has won three Paralympic and four World Championship medals.

First elected as the Member of Parliament for Delta (BC) in 2015, she served as Minister of Accessibility, Minister of Public Services and Procurement, and Minister of Sport and Persons with Disabilities prior to 2019. Committed to equity and inclusion, Qualtrough has practiced human rights law at the federal and provincial levels. She chaired the Minister's Council on Employment and Accessibility in British Columbia and was an adjudicator with the Workers' Compensation Appeals Tribunal.

Qualtrough has degrees in political science from the University of Ottawa and in law from the University of Victoria. Among many awards for her work, she has been named one of Canada's Most Influential



Carla Qualtrough, Member of Parliament and Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion. Photo: ourcommons.ca

Women in Sport numerous times and received a Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal in 2012. ■

Mike Cohen is the editor of Inspirations. He can be reached at mcohen@emsb.qc.ca.



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Making accessible transportation a priority through MUVE

by *Jordan Stoopler*

Anthony William Shannon was in search of his next big idea when he visited Toronto in 2017.

He was after a venture with “a net positive impact,” part of a move for business practices to put more into society, the environment and the global economy than it takes out. He was looking for something that would help the community at large.

He found it in the back of a ride-sharing car.

“It was this amazing and spacious accessible vehicle,” recalled Shannon. “The driver explained to me the importance of accessibility in Toronto and in Canada. He mentioned how they had so many accessible vehicles driving around, but they were in need of an app to allow for an easier and more seamless booking process.”

Shannon was just the man for the project. The 28-year-old serial technology entrepreneur from Montreal had spent the

better part of his young life building apps and websites for small startups and large Fortune 500 corporations. He had also witnessed firsthand the struggles those with a disability face on a daily basis through his uncle Bill, who battled ALS.

Shannon, in partnership with a team of expert technologists, designers and builders, created MUVE (My Universal Vision for Everyone). The app enables users to book “on demand door-to-door and arm-to-arm accessible transportation.” Users build a profile upon downloading the app, where they can specify their accessibility needs. Drivers are trained and ready to assist all users, no matter their abilities.

“My partners taught me the principle of Universal Design early on,” said Shannon. “It is about developing a service that can be easily accessed, understood and leveraged to the greatest extent by people of all backgrounds, ethnicities or abilities. We really wanted to take a holistic approach to the problem of mobility and community.”

The app offers a human-centred approach, through voice integration and the ability of a third-party to book transportation on someone else’s behalf. In addition, the app allows users to crowdsource information about accessible locations and businesses around town. A community events section is also built into the app.

While the app is still in its pilot stage, it has already serviced a large segment of the population, first in Michigan, and most recently on Montreal’s West Island through a partnership with the STM last fall.

“It was a very successful project,” said Shannon. “We reduced the wait time for transportation from 45 minutes down to 10 to 15 minutes for on-demand trips. By the end of the project, more than half of the community was using the app as the primary booking tool.”

Over 100,000 trips have already been taken through MUVE. Shannon estimates those numbers will continue to climb through



Anthony William Shannon.
Photo courtesy of MUVE.

new partnerships with other cities and a more widespread release of the application.

“We like to turn problems into opportunities,” said Shannon. “We wondered how we can utilize technology to build a solution towards accessibility. Anything you can imagine, you can develop a solution for.” ■

The GO MUVE application is available free for download on iOS and Android. For more information, visit gomuve.com.



The telephone showerhead on a sliding bar while still having a stationary showerhead is gaining popularity.



Making home washrooms accessible, and safe

by *Ben Levine*

As the plumbing industry is always evolving, so are the options for accommodations. Not all plumbing companies are created equal. Part of what makes Levine Bros. Plumbing successful is our attention to detail and treating each project as unique. Every bathroom we work on takes into account the individual’s needs and wants. When it comes to specialty requests that is where we shine. We would like to highlight three details that can make your bathroom more accessible and safer for those with disabilities.

The first option, which is readily available, is toilets. Toilets come in two options: the “right height” and the regular height. Right height toilets are taller, making it easier for people who may have difficulty sitting down and getting up. On top of these two options, you can add toilet safety frames

and grab bars, which add stability for the user. A raised toilet seat can also be installed which adds four inches to the toilet. Clients can also purchase washlet seats that offer bidet functionality to standard toilets.

The second option is the client’s chosen fixtures. A shower faucet we find gaining popularity is the telephone showerhead on a sliding bar. We can even add one to an existing showerhead, so you don’t have to renovate the bathroom to add this option while keeping your stationary showerhead as well. If you are considering renovating, a walk-in bathtub can be very helpful. A new trend in design is a shower that doesn’t have a lip on the base, so it is easily accessible by wheelchair. Some of our clients find music to be calming. Showerheads are now available with integrated Bluetooth speakers.

A third option we recommend for many of our renovations is thermostatic fixtures. This allows for the temperature to be pre-set, and for separate control for pressure strength. We can also install a temperature limiter in the faucet so it can’t be set too hot. These measures ensure that the user doesn’t burn themselves in the bathroom. Another option we have installed is thermostatic mixing valves. This ensures that even if you have a dual handle faucet the user cannot burn themselves, even if they open the hot water handle fully, the water will not reach scalding temperatures.

Levine Bros. Plumbing has a long history of taking care of its customers – let us help you make your home safer and more accessible. ■

Ben Levine is the president of Levine Bros. Plumbing.

Quantico provides FBI thrills, battles prejudice

by *Ishini Fernando*



Quantico, the 2015 show created by Joshua Safran, follows the thrilling journeys of several young FBI agents as they lead and navigate secretive lives full of sacrifices and life-and-death situations. The show's first season begins with dual timelines, taking viewers back and forth between the FBI agents' trainee days at the academy in Quantico, Virginia and present time when the main protagonist Alex Parrish, played by Priyanka Chopra, struggles to piece together her reality after waking up in the aftermath of a bomb explosion. Even though she is unable to recall what happened to her, she is taken into questioning in a room displaying photos of her classmates from the FBI academy, as one of them is a suspect in masterminding the bomb attack. She soon discovers that

she is a pawn about to be sacrificed and is forced to flee the authorities to uncover the truth on her own.

Apart from its intriguing plot, the show is known for its very diverse cast. Among them is Academy Award-winning actress Marlee Matlin, who plays Jocelyn Turner, an ex-FBI agent who lost her hearing in an accident while on a mission. Jocelyn first makes her appearance in the third season when she is recruited to become a member of the FBI Black Ops team. Not long after her introduction in the show, Jocelyn is seen defending herself against a colleague who challenges her capabilities as a deaf agent. Her fight against prejudice is a recurring theme in her character's journey. However, having once been a top undercover agent in her field, Jocelyn quickly proves to be an unstoppable and passionate force long after recovering from the costly

accident, adapting to life without hearing, and learning ASL and to read lips. Matlin, the actress who plays her, is also deaf in real life, having lost her hearing at 18 months old due to illness. Despite the challenges she had to face, Matlin's acting career has been highly successful. She appeared in the police drama series *Reasonable Doubts*, *Picket Fences* and *The West Wing*, where she plays the pollster Joey Lucas. She is the first deaf performer to have won an Academy Award in the best actress category in 1987.

Quantico is thrilling, action-packed and filled with many twists and turns that are sure to leave viewers second-guessing their storyline predictions. The show's inclusion of characters of diverse backgrounds and cultures makes for an interesting ensemble to watch. *Quantico's* three seasons can be viewed on Netflix. ■

Not your average Bat Mitzvah girl

by *Randy Pinsky*

When asked about *Becoming Big*, Maya Sinclair responded, "It's about an average, normal, almost 12-year-old girl." But as mom Jana Popliger corrected, "Maya is anything but average."

Becoming Big (2021) is a coming-of-age story of a young girl who had overcome numerous health challenges to have an impactful Bat Mitzvah ceremony. Funded by the Jewish Community Foundation of Montreal's Nova Grants and produced by Rabbi Mark Fishman of Congregation Beth Tikvah, the documentary recounts Maya's Bat Mitzvah journey; when 12-year-old girls become adults in the eyes of the Jewish community – literally, "becoming big."

On February 16, *Inspirations'* own Mark Bergman moderated an Armchair Interview hosted by Federation CJA West Island in honour of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance, and Inclusion Month.

Popliger knew something was wrong right from birth. Maya wouldn't stop crying and she was not meeting milestones. A medical student was able to crack the mystery by remarking on her eyes: the clue to the Axenfeld-Rieger syndrome diagnosis.

According to the Genetic and Rare Diseases Information Center, the condition can lead to loss of vision as well as other medical challenges. Though Maya is small in stature, this has not stopped her from striving to meet her goals. "She is the ultimate warrior," said grandfather Sheldon Popliger.

"For her to say, 'I want a Bat Mitzvah. I want to stand up in front of people and make a speech,' five years ago, I would have never believed it," said her mother, making reference to Maya's selective mutism (an anxiety disorder where individuals feel unable to speak in certain settings). "But we did it."

Maya's Bat Mitzvah talk was fittingly about Judaism's forefathers who all grappled with

physical challenges yet prevailed. Abraham experienced difficulties in old age; Isaac was blind, Jacob had a limp, and Moses led the Jewish people to freedom in spite of a speech impediment.

"*Eyzeh hoo gibor?* Who is a hero in the Jewish tradition?" asked Rabbi Fishman. "Judaism's definition of strength is not how much one can bench press; it comes from overcoming obstacles."

"Maya's Bat Mitzvah is a great example to everybody that a synagogue is able to celebrate every child in its community."

Wise beyond her years, Maya's Bat Mitzvah speech touched everyone. "God made me kind, smart and funny, yet He also gave me a unique set of challenges... I learned to be brave... pronounce medical terms that others cannot, be creative and use my voice."

Popliger reflected, "JDAIM is one month calling attention to disability awareness, but for us, it's every day. It's our real life."



Jana Popliger and her daughter Maya Sinclair, featured in the *Becoming Big* documentary, at their home in Dollard des Ormeaux on May 18, 2021.
Photo: Erin Sinclair

As a result, she hopes people will be "a little more kind, a little more forgiving and a little less judgmental."

Jodi Toledano, Federation CJA's Engagement and Outreach Specialist, concluded the event with, "Maya, you are truly the biggest person we know." ■

Teaching from the inside: Remrov writes about being autistic

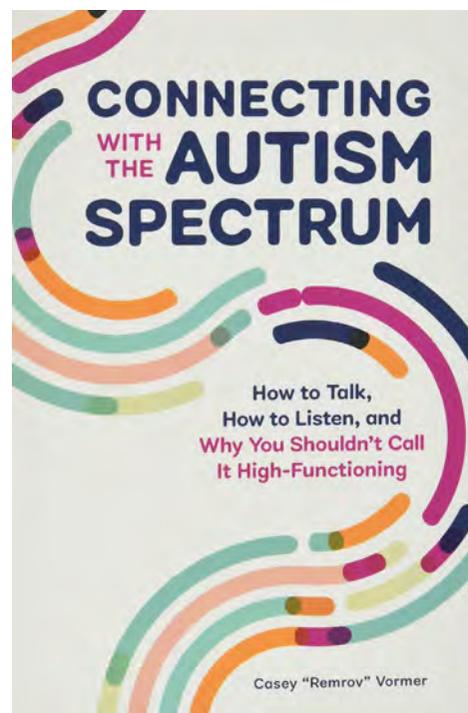
by *Roanne Weisman*

The words “I understand” are so easy to say. Yet despite the best of intentions, the meaning behind these two simple words can be profoundly different for each person who speaks them. Casey “Remrov” Vormer, who was diagnosed with autism in his early twenties, wrote *Connecting with the Autism Spectrum: How to Talk, How to Listen, and Why You Shouldn't Call It High-Functioning* (2020), to help neurotypical people gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of someone on the autism spectrum. Vormer prefers to call autism a “difference” rather than a “disorder” since autistic people often excel in thought processes and ways of thinking that neurotypical people find challenging.

The author is quick to point out that “If you know one person with autism you know one person with autism.” This means that while many people on the autism spectrum share similar experiences and difficulties, each individual has a unique life story. For this reason, he makes it clear that the book is based only on his own story but hopes that readers can learn from someone “on the inside” and what it feels like to be autistic. He tells readers that his book will “steer you in the right direction to improve your interactions with people on the autism spectrum, so everyone feels heard and respected.”

Vormer accomplishes this task very well, explaining, “Many books about autism [are] written by people who are not on the autism spectrum themselves. Even though they can share valuable information, they don't know what it really feels like to be autistic.”

To deepen his readers' understanding, Vormer tells us the story of his life, beginning as a child, progressing through elementary school, higher education, jobs and personal relationships. Throughout, he skillfully weaves in facts about autism,



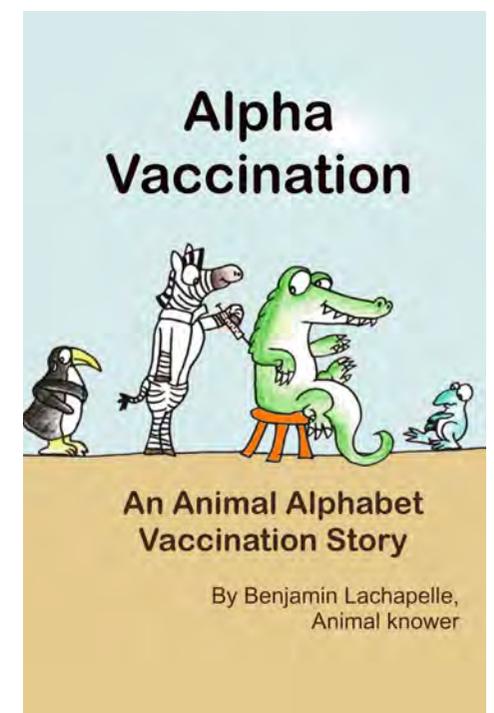
including suggestions of how neurotypical family members, friends, teachers and co-workers can help improve relationships with autistic people in many ways. These include avoiding instructions that are unclear or contradictory, avoiding confusing body language and non-verbal cues, and becoming aware that autistic people can become overwhelmed with too much sensory input. Many autistic people may also have “mind blindness,” which he describes as a lack of awareness of others' thoughts and knowledge.

But Vormer tempers problems with positivity, also explaining the strengths of many autistic people. These include punctual performance; high productivity; passionate and intense focus on specific interests, including music, mathematics and computer programming; visual thinking (Vormer himself is a talented artist); developing innovative solutions and creative products; and being “pattern obsessed.” He gives the example of Alan Turing, who cracked the Nazi “enigma” code during World War II. ■

Learning about animals, easing vaccination worries in book for young kids

by *Roanne Weisman*

Parents and young children will delight in *Alpha Vaccination: An Animal Alphabet Vaccination Story*, a whimsical, illustrated story of animals getting vaccinated. Author Benjamin Lachapelle offers a perfect way not only to learn the alphabet and the names of animals, but also to introduce calmness, compassion and some fun into the lives of young children who may be feeling turmoil as the pandemic turns their worlds upside down. From Alligator, “who's got his first shot” to Black Bear, “who was scared” and Boa Constrictor, “who helped Black Bear be brave” to Unicorn, “who knows vaccinations=vacations!,” children can use these animal friends to help them feel safe during vaccinations. At the end, they learn that “People get vaccines too, the tall and the small.” The talented author and illustrator, who is on the autism spectrum, and calls himself an “Animal Knower,” captivates all ages with his joy, optimism and love of animals. This book is a beacon of hope in the pandemic. ■



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Festival Imagine to showcase emerging and established autistic artists

by *Wendy Singer*

Festival Imagine aims to bring neurotypical and neurodivergent communities together to explore the rich inner world and creativity of autistic creators. This free, in-person arts festival is scheduled to take place on July 9 and 10 at Dunany Country Club in Wentworth, Quebec.

The festival will showcase the work of six emerging and established autistic artists, and celebrate neurodivergent passion, talent and diversity. Participating artists include Casey “Remrov” Vormer, Ryan Bothelho, Lena Baldoni, Zachary Reisman, Jonathan Pepin, Benjamin Lachapelle and Carly Hay as MC. In addition, the festival will include a collective exhibition of student artwork, morning painting workshops and interactive activities for the whole family.

Festival Imagine is spearheaded by Autism & Arts in the Laurentians (AAL), a free weekly arts program and social club for English-speaking autistic individuals living in the Laurentians, and partners Community Learning Centres and 4Korners. The festival coincides with AAL’s fifth anniversary.

Julie Chou, co-founder of AAL and Lachapelle’s mother, believes in the important role of community-building events like Festival Imagine in supporting the vitality of small communities. “The AAL members were completely videoconferenced out and were asking for more in-person activities. The pandemic has been hard for many of them,” said Chou. “I thought that an arts festival could be an effective way of bringing people together and celebrating their resilience.”



From left: Kathy Low, artist Suzanne Lacroix, Ben Lachapelle, Annabelle Copeland, Brandon Koyama, Jordan Osborne and Lynda Osborne at a mixed media workshop at the Autism & Arts in the Laurentians Clubroom at Laurentian Regional High School in the Fall 2021. Photo courtesy of Julie Chou

Reisman shares his illustrations on the gift cards that he and his mother, Lorri Benedik, sell through their company, Zach Designs. He is excited to be a part of Festival Imagine to meet new people and share his artwork alongside other autistic artists. “I am looking forward to seeing what the other artists are working on and

show my work to a whole new group of people,” said Reisman. “It would be great to have more events like this in Montreal. People with special needs have a lot of talent and should have the opportunity to showcase them so that people will change the way they think about us.” ■

CODA takes home three Oscars

by *Ishini Fernando*



CODA, the 2021 Apple TV+ movie directed by Sian Heder, took Hollywood by storm at the 2022 Academy Awards with three wins. Not only did the film win best picture, becoming the first win of its kind for a streaming service, but its writer-director, Heder, won best adapted screenplay. Making the night even more spectacular, Troy Kotsur walked away with a best supporting actor award and became the second deaf performer to win an Oscar, following his co-star Marlee Matlin’s win 35 years ago.

CODA is a coming-of-age movie about 17-year-old Ruby (Emilia Jones), who struggles with the responsibilities to her family while trying to pursue her dream of becoming a singer. It is an English language remake of 2014 French film *La Famille Bélier*.

Ruby is a CODA (Child of Deaf Adults) and the only hearing member of her family. Throughout the film, she is often seen interpreting sign language for her parents, helping out with the family’s fishing business and struggling as a high school student. Her father Frank (Troy Kotsur) and mother Jackie (Marlee Matlin) highly depend on her, becoming a heavy burden to bear when Ruby discovers her desire to attend a distinguished music school far away from the family home. On the flipside, her older brother Leo (Daniel Durant) is of the opinion that Ruby prevents the family from being independent because their parents have learned to rely on her too much.

The family drama is filled with hilarious and heart-warming moments that are sure to bring out reactions from even the most

poker-faced viewers. While beautifully filmed, it is the cast’s stellar performance that brings out the very best of an otherwise familiar storyline of a small-town girl trying to pursue her dreams, and makes *CODA* truly shine.

Along with its success, the film has provoked debate about whether it did the deaf community a disservice by showcasing deaf people from a hearing perspective. As much of the movie highlighted Frank and Jackie’s dependency on their daughter, many felt the film missed its chance to break stereotypes surrounding disability and better represent the deaf community. Nonetheless, its Oscar wins remain a breakthrough moment for deaf performers and audiences. ■

MMFA presents supplies pack for families of autistic children

by *Randy Pinsky*

Museum trips for families with autistic kids will now be a bit easier and a lot more enjoyable, thanks to a new initiative provided by the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA).

Launched on World Autism Awareness Day, April 2, the museum is offering a new way to explore its collection.

Dubbed the Sensational Supplies Pack, each toolkit includes calming objects, multisensory material, noise-cancelling headphones and dark sunglasses, guided activities as well as a detailed map of the museum.

Available for free upon reservation, families are invited to visit on weekends from 10 am to 12 pm.

Since 2015, in order to best inform its approach in welcoming neurodiverse individuals, the MMFA has implemented art therapy, creative workshops and guided tours with organizations such as The Gold Centre, Miriam Foundation, Autisme sans limites as well as several schools as part of its Art of Being Unique program.

“We at the museum are experts in the way that we interact with the artworks, and these schools and organizations are experienced in how we can engage with autistic and neurodiverse people,” explained Mélanie Deveault, director of the Education and Wellness Division, MMFA. “We can share our knowledge in order to make the museum even more accessible.”

Last year, the museum also launched a guide intended for professionals in the museum field, in collaboration with the Dallas Museum of Arts and the Palais des Beaux-Arts de Lille.

Deveault’s passion for the project is evidenced in her commitment to fostering wellness, inclusion and togetherness through art such as The Art of Being Unique program, as stated on the website.

On World Autism Awareness Day, the MMFA posted, “Today and every other day, let’s embrace the unique ways we engage with the world and welcome those of others.” The Sensational Supplies Packs have been recognized by families and museum educators alike as being a great way for children to explore at their own pace, together, explained Patricia Lachance, media relations officer.

Guided activities can be calming for autistic individuals who may have trouble expressing or regulating their emotions. For example, talking about artworks might be made easier if they can simultaneously receive tactile stimulation.

The process of creating the maps was also illuminating, observed Deveault. In identifying potential triggers, for example lights and sounds, staff tried to perceive the museum through the eyes of others. “C’est à double sens. It’s really a collaborative effort,” she noted. “Families are helping us to see the collection and the world in another way.”

The museum is looking forward to welcoming families: “With people being isolated on and off for two years, we really believe museums can play a role in bringing people together,” said Deveault. ■

For more information: www.mbam.qc.ca/en/activities/a-sensational-supply-pack-for-a-sensory-based-exploration-of-the-museum.



Photo: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts |

What’s a ‘situationship’? Check out Special Connections online meeting tool

by *Mark Bergman*

Stephanie Mitelman and Mathew Selvin are on a mission to create special connections for people with different abilities. “The biggest theme to come out of the last two years was loneliness. And people with special needs had an even harder time connecting with one and other,” said Mitelman.

Mitelman, a sexologist and part-time faculty member at Concordia University, and Selvin, a special needs consultant and behaviourist, have created Special Connections, a unique program to help young adults with special needs find social partnerships, companionships and relationships.

Through an online form, people can select what type of “special connection” they are looking for. They range from anything from a friendship to a life partner or even a “situationship.” Someone to date casually. In April, they had dozens of people with a wide variety of abilities who had signed up.

The second phase of this program will be to connect people with similar interests, either online or in person, during a potential event this summer. ■

To access the Google Forms to Special Connections Montreal Intake Form, go to: <https://forms.gle/zPWCaw8cplDyu2W99>

JDAIM 2022 hears from roster of interesting speakers

by *Randy Pinsky*

For the second year in a row, Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM) was online, but this did not reduce the energy and diversity of events in the least.

Read our full story here: <http://www.inspirationsnews.com/inspirations/articles/jdaim-2022-hears-from-roster-of-interesting-speakers>.

Montreal Children's Hospital the 'SPOT' for rapid mental health services

by *Jordan Stoopler*

The COVID-19 pandemic has brought the issue of mental health in young people to the forefront. The Montreal Children's Hospital saw emergency department visits relating to anxiety disorders and suicidal thoughts rise by 35 per cent in the first year of the pandemic alone.

In response to this uptick, the hospital and its Foundation has opened a new outpatient centre geared specifically for those between the ages of 12 and 18 in suicidal crisis dubbed Le SPOT Montreal.

"The centre was created to bridge the gap that existed between the initial visit to the ER by teenagers with suicidal crises and the follow-up with community services," said Mélanie Bazin, clinical coordinator for Le SPOT. "Because of the pandemic, there have been a lot of delays. We wanted to make sure we were able to provide services quickly."

Patients can expect to be referred and treated at Le SPOT within 72 hours of their initial visit to the emergency room at

the Montreal Children's, a sharp contrast from the six-month average wait time for services outside this program. Bazin said services are adapted to the individual needs of the patient and their family. Intensive individualized therapy can be provided for up to 12 weeks, as needed.

"Our interdisciplinary team is made up of psychologists, social workers, an occupational therapist, psycho-educators, a psychiatrist and a nurse," said Bazin. "The entire team is under one roof to make sure the patients receive the care that they need and that they are well-equipped to manage in the community."

Another important element of the Centre is its commitment to ensuring their patients remain in school and continue their normal routines throughout. Le SPOT liaises with all individual schools in an effort to keep students at ease, no matter their surroundings.

"We work in collaboration with schools for the benefit of the child," said Bazin. "The school is actively involved to make sure



Le SPOT's multi-disciplinary team of mental health professionals at the centre on the day of its official launch, March 18. Photo: Ryan Blau, PBL Photography

they receive the services they need and are provided the information necessary to create a safety net and accommodations at school."

Le SPOT hopes to be able to treat 500 teens annually, with the goal of doubling those figures by its second year of operation. \$12 million was raised by the Foundation to design and build the centre, with funds secured to operate the centre for the next 10 years.

"We are very fortunate to have leaders who think outside of the box and have put in place a centre that rapidly addresses the needs of the patients," said Bazin. "Patients, families and the schools are relieved to know that their child or student has access to services during these times of crisis. To be a part of it from the beginning stages is a privilege." ■

Everyone to the table: Ryerson panel explores advancing disability rights

by *Randy Pinsky*

In working towards a more inclusive Canada, who should decide how funds are prioritized and allocated? Does philanthropy come from a charitable or an empowering mindset? And are those directly implicated involved in the decision-making process?

Ryerson University's Advancing Disability Rights panel discussed these issues and more on January 31 as part of the Generous Futures series sponsored by TD Bank Group.

Panelists included disability activist and feminist educator Fran Odette; motivational speaker Taylor Lindsay-Noel; and former Canadian senator Vim Kochhar. A member of the national Canadian gymnastics team, Lindsay-Noel became paralyzed from the neck down due to a fall from the high bar in 2008. As a young Black entrepreneur,

she is the owner of Cup of Té, which was recently added to Oprah Winfrey's Favorite Things 2020 List. Kochhar is a longtime advocate for disability rights and the founder, chair and CEO of the Canadian Foundation for Physically Disabled Persons.

Moderator Esther Ignagni, director of Ryerson's School of Disability Studies and herself blind, observed that although disabled people make up 22 percent of Canadians, they experience numerous obstacles in work, education and healthcare.

One of the main points put forth by the panelists was the need to include those not always invited to the decision-making table. Rather than having specialists and caregivers speak on their behalf, corporate boards and organizations are realizing the value of firsthand knowledge.

"Framing our work through a disability justice lens is not just about responding to situations and addressing access to services," commented Odette. "It's also a struggle to start to bring disability into the centre of how we understand the world, as an opportunity to reimagine it and work towards social transformation."

As noted by Ignagni, "disability touches us all." Whether it is from birth, from age or from accident, the panel concurred that everyone benefits from efforts to make the world more accessible and just.

In order to promote this shift in narrative, Kochhar is dedicated to establishing bursaries for students with disabilities in all the major Canadian universities. He has also been at the forefront of promoting Paralympic athletes and getting Paralympic medals to be viewed as equal to their Olympic counterparts.

Through leading a "Why Not" marathon, he successfully secured permanent government funding and greater media attention for para-athletes. In recognition of his efforts, Kochhar was invited to be a torch bearer at the 2010 Winter Paralympics in Vancouver.

"By advancing disability rights, you are uplifting an entire society of people," observed Lindsay-Noel. Odette agreed, concluding, "Every time we [engage in] projects that are disability-led and disability-centred, we are creating opportunities for people with disabilities to flex our power – not in spite of our disability, but because of [it]." ■

Canadian Paralympians shine at Beijing 2022

There was no shortage of inspiring triumphs to celebrate last March at the Beijing 2022 Paralympic Winter Games in China. Canada's delegation of 48 athletes, plus four guides, captured 25 medals (eight gold, six silver and 11 bronze), ranking third in overall medals, behind host China and Ukraine.

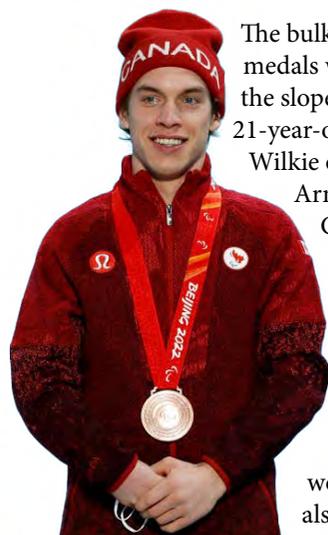
The medal count for Canada marks the country's second-best showing ever at the Paralympics, three short of the 28 won at the Pyeongchang Games in 2018.

by *Jordan Stoopler*



Gatineau's Anton Jacobs-Webb during Canada's para ice hockey preliminary round against the USA at the Beijing 2022 Paralympic Winter Games. Photo: Canadian Paralympic Committee/Angela Burger

"During the darkest of times, your performances shone brightly," said Andrew Parsons, International Paralympic Committee president at the games' closing ceremonies. "Rather than rely on history, you created it. On ice and on snow, you produced moments of magic and moments to savor. In the face of adversity, you showed strength in diversity."



The bulk of Canada's medals were won on the slopes, paced by 21-year-old Natalie Wilkie of Salmon Arm, British Columbia and 32-year-old Mark Arendz of Hartsville, Prince Edward Island. Each won four medals during the

Gatineau's Alexis Guimond earned the bronze medal in the men's standing Super-G event in Beijing on March 6. Photo: Canadian Paralympic Committee/Christian Petersen/Getty Images.

games, including a bronze medal, shared along with Collin Cameron and Emily Young, in the 4 x 2.5 km cross-country mixed relay.

It was West Vancouver's Mollie Jepsen who captured the country's first medal of the games, a gold in the women's standing downhill alpine skiing event. The 22-year-old, born without three fingers on her left hand, also collected a silver medal in the standing giant slalom competition. Her pair of medals at the 2022 games brought her career total to six, after the four she earned in Pyeongchang as an 18-year-old.

Jepsen faced her fair share of hurdles on her way back to the podium. She battled Crohn's in 2019, an inflammatory bowel disease causing chronic inflammation of the gastrointestinal tract. Jepsen was in remission when the COVID-19 pandemic first hit in March of 2020. She also raced with a torn ACL in one knee, an injury she suffered twice before as a teenager, and one that required surgery upon her return home from the games.

Jepsen was selected as Canada's flag-bearer at the closing ceremonies, a selection she described as "an honour of a lifetime."

Brian McKeever added three more gold medals to his collection in his sixth and final Paralympic Games. The 42-year old from Canmore, Alberta, rose to the top of the podium in the cross-country visually impaired sprint, 12.5 km middle distance and 20 km classical competitions. His trio of medals brought his career total to 20, including 16 golds – moving him into a tie with German alpine skier Gerd Schoenfelder for the most titles won by a male winter Paralympian.

Other notable medalists for Canada included Calgary's Alana Ramsay, who earned bronze medals in both the standing Super-G and super combined skiing events, and Campbell River, BC's Tyler Turner, who captured Canada's first ever para snowboard gold medal in snowboard cross along with a bronze in the banked slalom competition. Gatineau's Alexis Guimond also earned a bronze medal in the men's standing Super-G event. It was the 22-year-old's second Paralympic medal after he captured a bronze in the giant slalom in 2018.

Canada's wheelchair mixed curling team earned a bronze medal, while the Men's para ice hockey team collected a silver

medal, their sixth medal over the last eight Paralympic games.

The next Summer Paralympic Games will take place in Paris in 2024. Meanwhile, the Winter Paralympic Games are next scheduled for 2026 in Milan and Cortina, Italy. ■



Ina Forrest at Canada's wheelchair curling round robin session 2 against Switzerland at the Beijing 2022 Paralympic Games on March 3. Photo: Canadian Paralympic Committee/Angela Burger

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Als president shares advice on stuttering

by *Jordan Stoopler*



Mario Cecchini speaking to fans at a press conference on August 27.
Photo: Alouettes de Montréal – Dominick Gravel

As president of the Montreal Alouettes of the Canadian Football League (CFL), Mario Cecchini is often called upon to field questions from reporters or give interviews to members of the media, a task he takes on with relative comfort and ease these days.

During his childhood and adolescence, however, such activities would have been a nightmare for Cecchini as he dealt with stuttering.

“I remember the oral presentations in front of the class,” he said. “The words didn’t come out the way it should. There’s a certain amount of stress and nervousness facing authority and a crowd when you stutter.”

Cecchini says he first noticed he had a stuttering problem when he was about 10 years old. While his impediment was less apparent at home alongside family and friends, it became more pronounced at school.

He admits his confidence waned amidst his struggles. He remembers isolating himself from others in an effort to steer clear of any added attention towards his stutter.

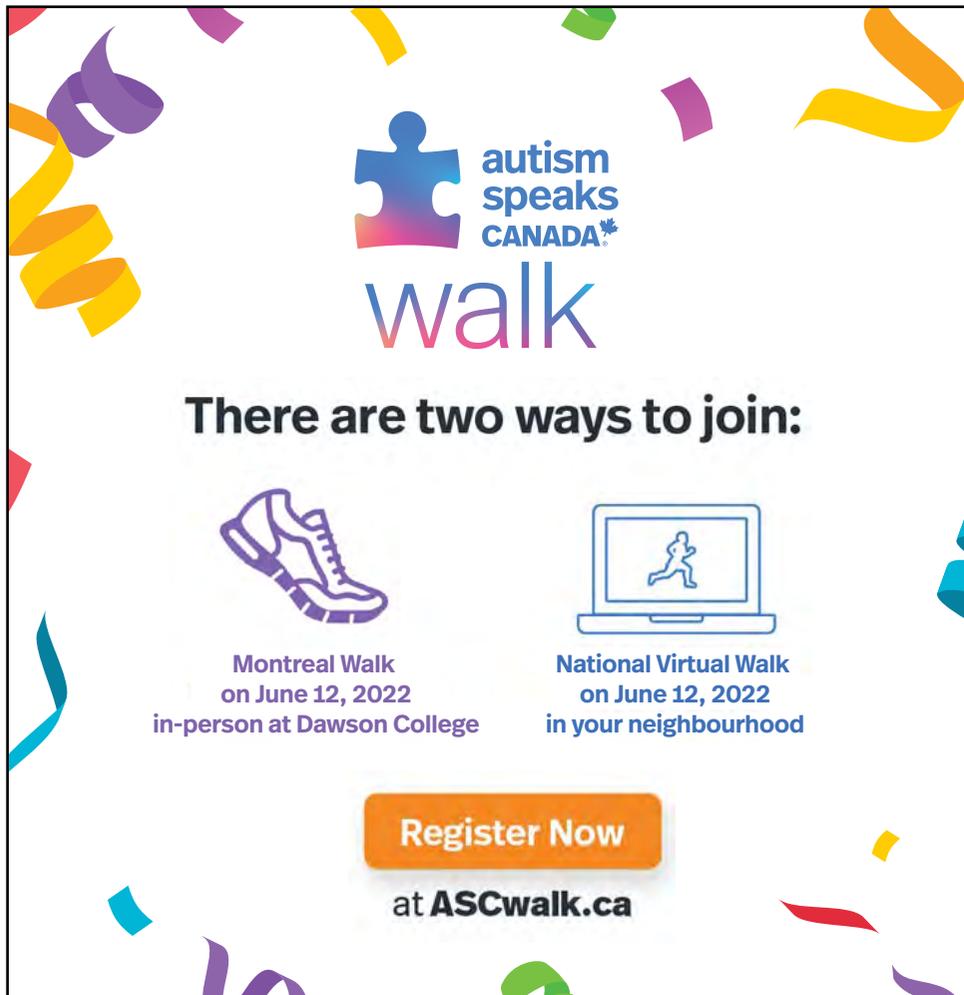
Cecchini says he truly hit rock bottom at the age of 17, when he moved away to Jonquière for his CEGEP studies in communications.

“I was in a reading class my first week of school,” recalls Cecchini. “I anticipated ahead of time I was the eighth or ninth person to read at the table. When it came time for my turn to read, I stumbled on some words. I lifted my head, and everybody was laughing hard.”

In the aftermath of that incident, Cecchini began to take steps to overcome his challenges. He met with a speech therapist, who offered him tools and tips, such as exaggerating his movement, slowing down his cadence, and other breathing exercises meant to curb his stutter.

“I refused to let my stutter define me,” he said. “You have to not care what other people think and concentrate on being yourself. The onus is on the other person to accept you for who you are.”

Cecchini says there is a general lack of awareness or understanding surrounding stuttering amongst the general population, with just 1.5 percent of the adult Quebec population (roughly 100,000 people) dealing with stuttering. ■



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Moe's Bar & Grill West Island

When in Pointe Claire, stop by Moe's Bar & Grill owned by Johnny Cripotos. The menu features many classic favourites such as their trademark smoked meat, a braised beef to die for, pizzas, burgers, Triple-A steak, paninis, salads and great desserts. They are open for lunch and dinner every day. Breakfast service will resume soon. The bar has a relaxed, fun atmosphere, with plenty of sporting events being played on multiple flat-screen televisions. A seasonal outdoor patio remains popular. Oh yes, there is a kid's menu. Last summer Cripotos organized an outdoor concert in the parking lot to bring some life to the area during the pandemic.

Moe's Bar & Grill West Island is located at 940 St. Jean Blvd. The place opens for lunch at 11:30 am each day. You can call for reservations or take-out. Home delivery is available via the standard apps. There is easy access for those in wheelchairs. If you have mobility issues, curbside pickup is available in the large parking lot.



| A smoked meat plate at Moe's.

Milestones



| The grilled sirloin at Milestones.

For family reasons, I am visiting Ottawa often these days, and they have a thriving dining scene. Let's start off with the Milestones Grill + Bar restaurant chain, purchased last summer by Montreal-based Foodtastic. Plans call for them to debut franchises in Laval and on the West Island in the fall. Foodtastic, a highly successful multi-brand restaurant company, is owned by brothers Lawrence and Peter Mammias. Milestones has been a leader in the casual fine-dining space in Canada for over 30 years by doing things a bit differently. Its menu includes various burgers, steaks and pasta dishes, assorted happy-hour fare and a kid's selection. I got a sneak peek on what to expect by experiencing the fine Milestones cuisine at the Ottawa Pinecrest location, complete with curbside pickup and located right off Highway 417 in a mall anchored by IKEA. The entry is wheelchair accessible, and there are accessible parking spots in the parking lot. A seasonal terrace is well arranged for wheelchair access. Home delivery is also available via the standard apps.

Shinka

Are you in the mood for terrific sushi? Shinka Sushi Bar (previously known as New Generation Sushi) is located on Laurier Ave. W. near Elgin in Ottawa. It has been around since 2004. As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it pivoted exclusively to take-out and delivery. Its clientele responded in strong numbers, so they have

Appetite for Ottawa Kettlemans Bagel



| Various bagels from Kettlemans.

Does Montreal really have the world's best bagels? I always thought so until I experienced Kettlemans Bagel in Ottawa. Kettlemans hand-rolled Montreal-style bagels, unique spreads, fresh salads and sandwiches make the perfect breakfast-to-go, lunch or late-night indulgence. Founder and Montreal native Craig Buckley opened the first store in August of 1993. Kettlemans has become a food institution – 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and 365 days a year – for 28 years. There are now four Kettlemans locations in Ottawa and two in Toronto. And guess what? They are finally expanding to Montreal in 2022 at l'avenue des Canadiens-de-Montréal, across the street from the Bell Centre. The three Ottawa locations I visited were all accessible, but the ones at the Trainyards and in Kanata have the best parking setups -including accessible access. A new pick-up window has proven to be popular in Kanata. This allows guests to pre-order their favourite menu items via the Kettlemans mobile device and the geo-fencing technology will send the order to be fulfilled once the guest has crossed that threshold.

stuck to this format. Two new locations will open soon. For those with mobility issues, you need only pull your vehicle in front, and someone will bring the meal to you. At Shinka, consider ordering omakase style, which means the chef will select seasonal specialties.

The Works

High on my list in Ottawa is The Works Craft Burgers & Beer. Open since 2001, this wildly popular and award-winning full-service neighbourhood bistro is known for its more than 30 different, hand-prepared gourmet burgers, fresh hand-cut fries, cool classic shakes and ice-cold beer, which are all 100 percent Canadian. The Works offers guests eight different patty options as well as gluten-free and vegetarian combinations. There are 28 locations in Ontario and as of December 2, one in Cairo, Egypt. While the Works locations are all dine-in, they pivoted nicely to take-out and delivery. At the Glebe location on Bank St. in Ottawa, there is a public parking lot right next door. The entrance and tables are all wheelchair accessible, and the restaurant does offer curbside pickup. Home delivery is also available via the standard apps.

Red Lobster

Ask me which restaurant brand I miss most in Montreal, and I will always name Red Lobster, which mysteriously disappeared from Quebec back in 1997. Red Lobster still operates in four Canadian provinces: Ontario, Alberta, Manitoba and Saskatchewan. There are two locations in Ottawa. The one at 1499 St. Laurent Blvd., just as you enter the city, has always been our "go to" spot. Not only are there several accessible parking spots in the lot, but three more for curbside pickup. The entrance is fully wheelchair accessible. I love their piping hot clam chowder and lobster bisque, the mouthwatering signature biscuits and of course the fresh lobster served in a wide variety of ways. There are delicious desserts to choose from as well. Home delivery is also available via the standard apps.



| A beautiful presentation from Shinka.

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Simon Chang hanging out with Galileo Adult Education Centre's puppet personality Lady La-La in his showroom at 555 Chabanel Midtown.
Photo: Pickle Creative



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