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Summer 2020 / Été 2020

INSPIRATIONS

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CHAMP Nikan Nassiraei, with the support of his parents Mehrnoosh Movahed and Amir Nassiraei, gives back to the War Amps. Read the full story on p. 13.

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Message from the Editor:
The show must go on!

As we continue to navigate our way through this COVID-19 pandemic, the motto of our team at *Inspirations* is indeed "The show must go on!"

Inspirations is more than just a newspaper. We are a vital cog in the Quebec special needs community. Our special COVID-19 spring edition has received rave reviews, and we are very proud of the stories we shared.

I must admit that we were not certain of proceeding with this edition. However, our readers, advertisers, community organizations, educational institutions and political leaders called and emailed us with such wonderful story ideas, and we heard our calling. We actually began setting the editorial direction of this edition before the pandemic hit, and many of those stories appear on these pages. Of course, the COVID-19 theme is incorporated in a lot of our content.

While travel might not be on any of our immediate agendas, it is nice to dream of the day when this will all be over and we can look forward to a get-away. So I decided to write about my January visit to New York City, a tourism mecca which has seen that title ravaged by the virus.

While we adjust to the new normal, we thank you for continuing to welcome us into your heart. We live for "inspiring" stories – and there are so many to tell.

Thanks to our dedicated team, led by our Managing Editor Wendy Singer, for getting our message out!

A thank-you to frontline workers goes viral

By ***Wendy Singer***

Lena Baldoni created her masterpiece "thank you" rainbow drawing seen below, using the now iconic rainbow symbol shortly after shelter-at-home orders came into place on March 13. It was her way of showing her support and thanks to frontline workers in hospitals and long-term care facilities. Baldoni's painting has since become very popular in her home town of Saint-Geneviève, with local businesses displaying it in solidarity in their windows and real estate agents using it on their marketing materials.

Baldoni donated 250 postcards of her painting to the Lakeshore General Hospital and 250 to the West Island CIUSSS. She also delivered postcards to the local fire department and police stations, and to CHSLD Denis-Benjamin-Viger in L'Île-Bizard, where she worked several years ago. "It made me very happy because I still know people who work there," said Baldoni.

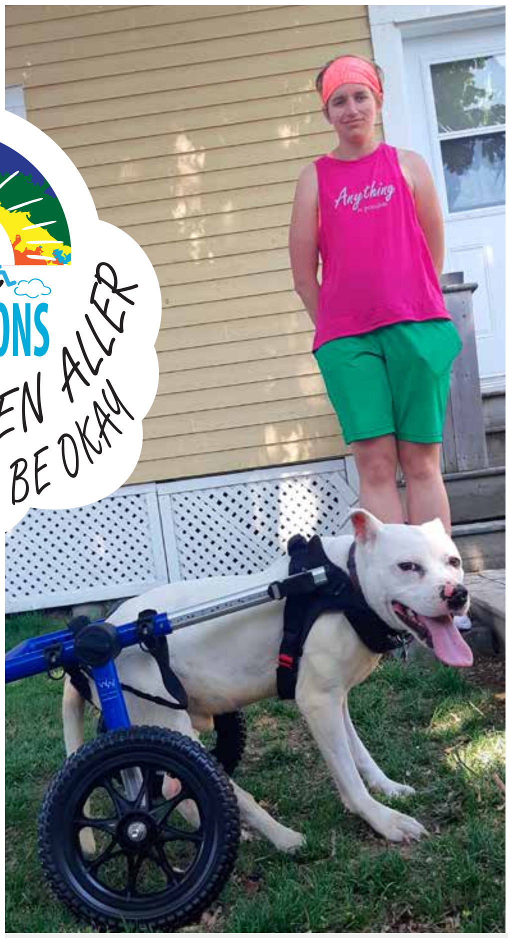
The 27-year-old, who attended John F. Kennedy High School in Beaconsfield and Program Contact, was diagnosed with autism when she was 20 months old. She began tracing objects at the age of 5, and soon after, created her own characters. Prior to March 13, she was working five days a week at Ste. Anne's Hospital for veterans, helping out in the cafeteria and library while interacting with the residents.

Baldoni has been spending her days at home painting, participating in activities with Special Olympics Quebec and socializing with friends online. While she is anxious to see her friends in September, she did manage to deliver a birthday gift and have a quick social distancing visit with her boyfriend recently.

When retail businesses opened on May 25, Baldoni and her mother Francine Boyer were first in line at Michaels craft store to stock up on canvasses and paint. Their next destination was Fabricville to fetch supplies to make kerchiefs for the Autism Speaks Canada Virtual Dog Walk that took place on June 7. Baldoni participated in the dog walk last year with her three dogs, including Pistol Pete, a northern rescue from James Bay who was born with deformities on his feet and could not walk. He now uses wheels to move around outside.

"We missed our shopping and look forward to going to the cinema," said Boyer. Both mother and daughter agreed that keeping busy and being productive was the best way to wait out the quarantine.

If you'd like to see more of Baldoni's artwork, visit *http://sourireanime.com/*



Lena Baldoni gets ready to take Pistol Pete, her northern rescue dog who is part American Staffordshire terrier, Collie and Boxer, for a stroll. (Photo, Francine Boyer)

Lena Baldoni's "Thank you" painting. (Photo, Lena Baldoni)

EMSB Trustee Marlene Jennings wins her battle against vision loss

By *Wendy Singer*

You may remember the Honourable Marlene Jennings as a Member of Parliament for the NDG-Lachine riding, having first been elected to office in 1997 and subsequently serving four more terms. While she officially retired in 2013, Jennings is now back in action as Trustee of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB).

During her accomplished 14 years in parliament, Jennings fought hard for improvements for her constituents. When 300 workers in a bankrupt Lachine company lost their jobs she convinced the minister responsible for Employment Insurance (EI) to set up a clinic in Lachine and waive the waiting period, allowing unemployed workers to more quickly access EI payments. And during the 1998 ice storm, she played a behind-the-scenes role in convincing the Quebec government to move its provincial emergency operations centre from Quebec City to Montreal, bringing emergency supplies to the most needy more quickly.

On the national stage, Jennings was one of the political leaders pushing for same-sex marriage rights. Along with the Minister of Justice, she convinced Prime Minister Jean Chrétien to send reference to the Supreme Court of Canada. And with a very small group of Liberal and Bloc Québécois MPs, she convinced the federal government to re-focus on funding social/affordable housing. She was also one of the Liberal MPs who led the fight against the merging of national banks.

Policies and improvements were not the only things Jennings had to fight for while in office. In January 2010, she was diagnosed with congenital acute degeneration of the retina, a form of macular degeneration (described by the Mayo Clinic as a chronic eye disorder that can lead to visual impairments or blindness). While macular degeneration is regarded as an age-related condition with a slow onset, Jennings was only 58 when her symptoms of flashes and spots suddenly appeared.

Knowing something was wrong, she sought immediate medical attention, and thus began a two-year, seven-surgery battle to repair and retain her sight. During this time, Jennings felt anxious and scared. “I was praying that my sight could be restored,” she said, admitting that losing her sight was a fear she’d had since childhood. Jennings has always been a lover of the written word; now with a penchant for crime and historical novels.

When Jennings was diagnosed as legally blind after her first surgery, she reached out to the Montreal Association for the Blind (MAB) – MacKay Rehabilitation Centre.

Marlene Jennings at her office at the English Montreal School Board.

“I went to the MAB and said ‘I need help,’ and they swung into action. They provided me with special sunglasses and trained me to use a white cane inside, outside and on public transit so I could be as autonomous as I could,” she remembered.

Through Emploi-Québec, the MAB equipped her with tools, including optical readers for her two computers, which allowed her to read and work throughout the two-year period by enlarging fonts and converting texts and images into digital signals that can be processed in various ways by computers, such it is text-to-speech.

The combination of seven different surgeries finally helped. Jennings is no longer legally blind, however complications from the procedures left retinal holes in both eyes. Surgery corrected her left eye, but she has “donut vision” in the right, meaning the central vision is black and she only sees from the peripheral ring. “The brain is a wonderful thing. It takes that donut image with the full image of my left eye, puts it together and so I see a full image. It’s wavy a bit depending on the angle,” she said, explaining how she has developed tricks to help her along. “I tend to bump into things if I’m not careful. Initially I was mortified. Now it’s part of my life. If I bang into something, I simply say ‘sorry, I don’t have all of my peripheral vision!”

This visual impairment does not impede Jennings’ work as Trustee of the EMSB: “I have to be careful not to strain my eyes. Instead of reading 10 hours straight I will read for one hour and take a 10-minute break.”

Born into a poor working-class family with seven siblings, Jennings became a lawyer with the intent to become a judge. She is grateful that her life took an unexpected turn. “I would have been an exceedingly frustrated judge. Judges have to practice being discreet and not voicing opinions as seen as political,” she said.

As a member of the Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre’s Advisory Committee, Jennings brings her life experience and sensitivity about issues of impairment and policies to the table. “The Montreal Association for the Blind provides amazing services in rehabilitation, whether it’s physical, visual or auditory. The staff is well-trained and dedicated. They will do what’s needed to help you and fight that fight for you,” she said.

A fierce advocate who has always stood up for what is right, Jennings hopes that our society has changed enough to treat everyone equally. She encourages people to seek out resources in our community that are there to help.

INSPIRATIONS

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Zera Café:

Shifting missions to provide food for Montrealers in need

By *Randy Pinsky*

"I've never worked this hard in my life," confided Eve Rochman, founder of Zera Café & Catering. She described how the company quickly switched gears when COVID-19 hit, transforming its original business model of offering neurodiverse adults with special needs hands-on catering experience to mass-producing meals for vulnerable families.

Since April 21, Rochman and her team have cooked and assembled 1,600 meals, using the Shaare Zion synagogue kitchen as their home base. Zera Café's cooking program is funded by two grants from Federation CJA, which also manages the volunteers, selects the families and coordinates the deliveries, allowing Rochman to be the creative head. Recipients include Auberge Shalom, Maison Shalom, JEM Workshop, Yaldei Developmental Center, Friendship Circle, senior homes and vulnerable individuals. "It's fortunate that this is a multi-step process, as people are actually fighting to get a shift!" said Rochman, laughing.

Andrya Linder and Yasmine Mahrach volunteering at Zera Café. (Photo, Zera Café)

Overseeing an initiative of this magnitude is not for the faint of heart, however Rochman is never one to back down from a challenge. A seasoned cook, she is no stranger to preparing meals for large gatherings – she even catered her daughter's bat mitzvah in her own home.

That is how the original impetus of the Zera Café came into being. Upon hearing that special needs programming ended at age 21, Rochman decided to combine her talents and diploma in management, health and social services to serve this niche. She drew on her affinity for the community (her children are active volunteers at Friendship Circle), and launched Zera Café in February 2020 as a "social enterprise catering service that employs and trains young adults with intellectual and developmental diversity."

While the current situation does not allow for her staff with special needs to be at work (many have immunity issues), Rochman ensures her apprentice cooks practice their kitchen skills by offering weekly online sessions. Acknowledging that available supplies are often limited, she plans simple menus. "I didn't want them to have to go out and get fancy ingredients," she shared. "So we've gotten pretty creative."

This neurodiverse group usually thrives off of the socialization as well as intangible benefits, such as independence and the feeling of accomplishment. Families have commented on their renewed sense of self-esteem, particularly important during this time of disrupted routine.

While the catering business has been put on a temporary hold, Rochman shared how the transition to relief effort cooking has been a great learning experience. "My intention is to figure out a way to continue cooking these meals while also selling some at market value to revive the business."

The impact of having home-cooked food in these uncertain times, which can bring with it the feeling of having been thought of, lasts exponentially longer than the meal itself. Ranging from quiches and hearty soups to the ever popular tuna patties, the meals are like a much-needed hug.

The team of "pandemic heroes" has chopped, tasted and prepped at high speed "so that we can be a community you can count on," Rochman said. And in their aim to integrate individuals from the special needs community – true to their original mission – Zera Café is serving up love with every meal they deliver.

Zera Café and partner organization Club ALink are looking forward to resuming their regular catering services. Their most recent contract was for Federation CJA in celebration of Jewish Disabilities Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month in February, where participants raved about their signature tahini brownies.

Visit Zera Café on Facebook and YouTube.

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We'll win

By *Kevin Calla*

This year is tough but if we remain calm we'll win
This year is tough but if we come up with a plan we'll win
This year is tough, but if no one cries we'll win
This year is tough but if we keep fighting through it we'll win
This year is tough but, if we keep going forward we'll win
But most importantly if we all work together as a world we'll win against the coronavirus.

Kevin Calla is a 19-year-old student at L.I.N.K.S. High School's Autonomy Preparation Program. He wrote this poem in class when his teacher asked the students to express themselves on paper. Calla agreed to read his poem at the L.I.N.K.S. graduation ceremony that was held on June 19.

Kevin Calla at L.I.N.K.S. on June 5, the first day back after schools were shut down. (Photo, L.I.N.K.S. High School)

Mental health tip: Building a coping toolkit

By *Despina Vassiliou*

Everyone at times has been troubled by something that has happened to them or something they have to face. When these situations cause us stress, it is sometimes difficult to think clearly, which is exactly what is needed in order to start the problem-solving process.

As children often have not yet developed this skill, parents can help by engaging with them in a conversation in order to identify what helps them feel better. It is best to have this conversation when the child is in a positive mood and perhaps as a family in order to share ideas. Listed below are some coping strategies you may find helpful, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic:

Identify a trusted adult who is a friend: Help your child identify a trusted adult they can speak to. It is sometimes okay to be able to speak to someone other than a parent, as parents cannot always be accessible. The person should be someone who can help the child go through the problem-solving process or someone who is caring and a good listener.

Exercise: Working out helps clear the mind which can help generate ideas.

(Photo, Headstartprimary.com)

Yoga or mindfulness: These activities help us to reset. There are many YouTube videos available that can guide children, teens or adults through these processes *(see Danika Swanson's article on mindful listening on p 11 of this edition).*

Journal writing/drawing: Expressing what troubles us can sometimes help us process our thoughts, and then we can refocus our efforts on finding solutions.

Pets: Petting, playing or caring for a beloved pet has been shown to have physiological benefits in decreasing stress levels in our bodies, putting us into a positive mood and hence in a better place to think through problems.

Distractions: These can help us take a step away from the situation and reset our focus. Some examples include:

- Reading a book
- Listening/making music
- Watching a movie
- Bubble bath
- Art (e.g., drawing, painting, etc.)

Gratitude and reframing: Take some time every day to find three things one can be grateful for. It can help to reframe our focus from only looking at problems by focusing on what makes us stronger.

Keep in mind that coping tools are personal, and different tools can be useful at different times. Discussing the many different options with your child or children can help them have a larger variety of options. Given that we are now living through a pandemic, building these coping skills is more important than ever. They help build resiliency, which is what helps us grow and makes us stronger in times of adversity such as what we are currently experiencing.

Dr. Despina Vassiliou is a school psychologist with the English Montreal School Board and part of its Mental Health Resource Centre.

Collectively moving through the grieving process

By *Stephanie Paquette*

In April, I read an article on the American Psychological Association's website titled "Grief and COVID-19: Mourning our bygone lives." This article eloquently summarized how we are currently experiencing a historical moment of collective grief and that we are all losing something. Loss is defined as the process of losing something or someone, and COVID-19 has covered both these spheres. Our collective losses have been numerous: death of loved ones, loss of human contact and socialization, loss of employment, the breakdown of intimate relationships, as well as the loss of structure, routine and a sense of predictability.

In addition to some of the above-listed losses, I have also started to lose my patience. Increased fatigue and additional responsibilities have led to an accumulation of frustrations; I recently realized that these frustrations were being evacuated on my children. Last week, I yelled at my 3-year-old for ramming his toy tow truck into my heel, while my 6-year-old wailed under the kitchen table in protest against doing his math activities. The kids and I were both surprised to hear the growl that erupted from within me. As I became aware of my anger, I chose to walk away from my children, took a few minutes to calm down and then went back to debrief the situation and apologize for my reactive behaviour. During my calm-down period, I became aware that my reaction to the children was directly related to my sense of loss. As described in the above-mentioned journal article, COVID-19 has ruptured my attachments and shaken my sense of self.

I am currently in the "anger" phase of grief. Anger has a tendency to mask the pain that we are feeling and is often a symptom of sadness or fear. When I reflect upon my anger in these terms, it helps me to better understand my reactions and indulge what my sad and fearful self needs in order to feel okay. When the pandemic first occurred, many of us experienced reactions of shock and disbelief, while others quickly felt the pain of loneliness. As we travel along this path of collective grieving, we may also start to experience feelings of acceptance of our current situation and perhaps even celebrate moments of joy and togetherness with our children.

Our children are also experiencing a monumental period of grief. Children, particularly those with special needs, may not have the language needed to describe their feelings of loss, and they may experience grief bursts. These bursts are sudden, overpowering, and intense waves of emotion that seem to come out of nowhere. Grief bursts may arise during a milestone such as an anniversary, holiday or a birthday. Their significant losses can turn a child's world upside down.

Helping children with special needs build a vocabulary regarding loss can help reduce the intensity of a grief burst. This can be done by talking about the significant loss. To do so, it is best to use age and developmentally appropriate language and concepts that your child will understand and that won't overwhelm them. These discussions can help alleviate some of the anxiety surrounding loss. Using concrete words, giving small bits of information at a time and reassuring your child that they are safe, that you love them and that you will continue to care for them, can help ease some of your child's discomfort.

This grieving process is propelling me to make choices that are gentle on myself and gentle on my children. I am choosing to celebrate mine and my children's resilience, engage in moments of togetherness through play and shared meals, and set aside some of my habitual household tasks. We are collectively grieving but we are also collectively strong. Together we can create meaning and opportunities for growth during this challenging period.

If you require guidance on how to speak with children and youth about death and dying, please refer to this website: https://kidsgrief.ca/

Stephanie Paquette is a behaviour management specialist at the English Montreal School Board.

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Greta Thunberg: *Teaching a new generation about climate change and ASD*

By *Tania Piperni*

Greta Thunberg outside the Swedish Parliament where she started her school strikes for the climate. (Photo, Anders Hellberg, Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 4.0 International license)

Greta Thunberg is a 17-year-old climate activist from Stockholm, Sweden. She was *TIME Magazine's* Person of the Year for 2019, making history by being the first teenager to receive this recognition. Thunberg has inspired millions of people, adults and teens alike, across more than 150 countries to take part in calling for climate change. She started with a solitary protest outside of the Swedish parliament on August 20, 2018 with her now famous hand-painted sign, "Skolstrejk för Klimatet" (school strike for the climate). From there others have followed, striking at their own schools in their own countries, creating "Fridays for Future" protests across Europe. Videos and photos of this youth movement went viral on social media on a weekly basis.

Thunberg now has international recognition. She has met several presidents and even the Pope. She has moved climate change to centre stage and has opened up more conversations and debates about it. Her speech addressing the UN is now famous and her "How dare you!" quote has gone viral when she shamed world leaders for failing to take action or even denying the climate emergency. She is a young leader fighting for a cause, transcending generations and borders…and she also has an autism spectrum disorder diagnosis!

In her TEDx Talk from Stockholm in November 2018, she eloquently explained her diagnosis and how it impacts her. "I was diagnosed with Asperger syndrome, obsessive compulsive disorder and selective mutism. That basically means I only speak when I think it's necessary. Now is one of those moments. I think in many ways, we autistic are the normal ones, and the rest of the people are pretty strange especially when it comes to the sustainability crisis, where everyone keeps saying that climate change is an existential threat and the most important issue of all, and yet they just carry on like before."

Thunberg highlights the perks of neurodiversity, seeing things as black and white, right and wrong. Realizing the dangers of climate change, nothing stops her while on her mission to correct this injustice as she wins over hearts around the world. "Being different is a superpower," she wrote on her Twitter feed on August 31, 2019. She powers through her challenges and highlights her strengths as she sheds light on the importance of accepting neurodiversity and shows the world how people with a diagnosis are a meaningful aspect of society. Individuals on the spectrum can be hyperfocussed on different tasks and ignore social cues, traits that help her in pursuing her goals. Thunberg has said that not caring about what people think about her has also been an advantage for her. This can be conveyed to other individuals on the spectrum as they pursue their own unique goals.

More recently, Thunberg has directed her activism towards tackling the COVID-19 pandemic because she believes "like the climate crisis, the coronavirus pandemic is a child-rights crisis." After having received a Human Act award of $100,000 for her climate change work, she then donated that money to UNICEF, thus launching her new campaign, "Let's move humanity for children in the fight against coronavirus." The goal is to purchase soap, masks, and other protective equipment to protect children; along with safeguarding this vulnerable group from food shortage, increase in violence, loss of education and living with an overwhelmed healthcare system.

Thunberg is the face of the global movement on climate change, COVID-19 as well as an example of how any diagnosis does not need to be a DIS-ability but rather a different ability that can inspire, lead and influence. She educates the world and a new generation about world crises; furthermore she shows us what autism can look like, increasing awareness and shattering stigma. A true modern role model.

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

Latex technology helps visually impaired student excel at math

By *Victoria Stuhec in collaboration with Eital Houedakor*

Technology is almost always associated with screens and is often overlooked as a math learning tool, especially for a blind student. Braille documents have been the traditional approach to teaching math to students who are blind, but there are downsides to them: Delays often occur in acquiring the documents; they are more limited than class teaching and class examples; and they make it harder for the student to learn simultaneously with his/her peers.

Eital Houedakor is an 18-year-old Secondary 5 student at Beurling Academy who is blind.

He suffers from an atrophy of the eye, retinal detachment and a dysfunction of the optic nerve. The recipient of the Médaille du lieutenant-gouverneur pour la jeunesse du Québec, Houedakor came to Beurling Academy in Secondary 4, when he was already fully independent with using his laptop, braille reader and screen reader.

Houedakor remained passionate about math and science and was driven to "master" these subjects despite all the challenges they might pose. It was difficult to find a digital math book as most could not be read by Houedakor's screen reader. We found that we were able to adapt the Math Help Services program to suit his needs. Houedakor had been using Unified English braille (computer braille) and so this was used to write his math equations with a combination of words and symbols to express more complicated equations and functions. As the math got more complex, it became more difficult to transcribe the material, but it was also more challenging for Houedakor to understand and work with it independently. The challenges posed by this approach made math and science in college seem implausible.

At the beginning of Secondary 5, we discovered and started to use Latex, a typesetting math tool/language that allows you to type complex math formulas into normal text. It uses plain text to display equations and is well established in the science community. Houedakor found that Latex, with its standardized mathematical expressions and plain text display, allowed for accurate and accessible equations. It did mean that he had to adapt and learn to read the math in Latex format but he adjusted quickly, and the consistency and clarity made it easier for him to understand, learn and "master" it. Writing in Latex or converting the equations took some learning for those working with Houedakor. Initially, online software was used to convert the math but, over time, the use of Google Equatio proved easiest and, after a while, those working with Houedakor were able to just use the Latex format.

Traditional tools like braille documents (especially graphs and figures), tactile graph boards, and braille protractors are all still essential math tools for the blind learner. A multisensory approach that combined braille and a strong technological component helped Houedakor discover his true potential, achieve success and prepare him for his next academic challenge.

The COVID-19 pandemic kept Houedakor at home during the spring, and he missed the extracurricular activities. However, with technology that is easily made accessible for him, he can look forward to online classes at Cegep in Dawson's Pure and Applied Science program he plans to start in September.

Eital Houedakor is a Secondary 5 student at Beurling Academy. Victoria Stuhec is an occupational therapist with the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

Latex technology and braille help Eital Houedakor discover his true potential.

C.A.R.E. Centre combats pandemic isolation one client at a time

By ***Wendy Singer***

The C.A.R.E. Centre (Centre d'activités récréatives et éducatives), located at Wagar Adult Education Centre in Côte Saint-Luc, is Montreal's only English-language recreational and educational day program for adults over the age of 21 with physical disabilities. Many of the Centre's 27 clients live in long-term care facilities and group homes, and, at the time of this writing, had been restricted to their rooms with no visitors allowed.

Some are non-verbal and not able to access communication technology on their own. If the staff on duty are not trained to communicate with them, it leaves them without a voice to express themselves and their needs. In addition, Olivia Quesnel, executive director of C.A.R.E. explained that with no access to therapies and stretching, and often being placed in one position either in bed or a chair all day, their overall functioning is prone to deteriorate and pressure sores can develop.

While C.A.R.E is a recreational centre, its main mission is to break isolation and maintain the well-being of its clients. "The biggest part of our work is fighting mental health issues and making sure their hearts and minds are healthy," said Quesnel. "I am really worried about the risk of depression and anxiety, aging of their own bodies and the people that care for them, and the health and mental well-being of our clients since being cut off from our daily programming that was helping them so much."

Naama Glick, Frank Filippelli, Alix de Belleville, Angela Leduc, Carolina Baldassaree and Rebecca Desjourdy enjoy a community outing with C.A.R.E. before the pandemic. (Photo, C.A.R.E. Centre)

Now more than ever, Quesnel and her team of 12 caregivers are doing all that they can to ensure their clients remain connected to C.A.R.E. Since the shutdown, they have connected with many clients through technology, be it individual calls or online social activities, sharing fun videos and photos, personal reflections or a favourite place, and their weekly staff/client-run radio show. Clients and caregivers are also working on a project to create podcasts for a series called Stories of Care, which is produced by the C.A.R.E. Centre, Innovations in Concert and Bradyworks, funded by the Quebec government's "Culture in Schools" program and guided by clarinetist and Artist in Residence Louise Campbell. These podcasts are created based on a collection of experiences from clients, their families, caregivers and staff.

For those with limited mobility and access to technology, it is more of a challenge. Alain is non-verbal and lives in a long-term care facility. He has a landline in his room. "He created a system where he presses one for no, two for yes," said Quesnel. "I try to call him every night so I can make him laugh before he goes to sleep."

Difficult times call for innovative thinking. In her quest to connect, Quesnel is sending personalized postcards via MyPostcard.com (you send a photo and a message, they mail it) that she hopes are hung on the walls of clients' rooms to lift their spirits. Over the summer, C.A.R.E. vice president Ailsa Pehi will spread flower bombs throughout the city and near C.A.R.E. clients' residences to share joy and growth.

"The hardest part is knowing that there's a client sitting in a room on their own and I cannot connect with them," said Quesnel. "The whole purpose of C.A.R.E. is to bring the clients together as a group and to make sure they're included."

With C.A.R.E.'s camp and summer activities cancelled, the team is hoping for a September reopening that will meet all Ministry standards for health and safety. At that time, they will be ready to support clients and their caregivers with the mental and physical rebuilding that will be needed.

Life during COVID-19:
Insights from an autistic adult

By ***Randy Pinsky***

Kelly Bron Johnson.
(Photo courtesy of Kelly Bron Johnson)

Have you ever wondered how people with autism have adjusted to the pandemic? *Inspirations* received firsthand insight from Kelly Bron Johnson, diagnosed as an adult and the mother of an autistic child.

Johnson is on the board of directors of Autism Canada, and is one of five administrators of their Facebook group, Autism Canada ASD Central. She also runs a business called Completely Inclusive. "I use this to take the pulse of how people are doing across the country," said Johnson, particularly in regards to the pandemic. She has identified two common reactions.

Some are experiencing increased stress due to the break in routine so important to them, where unpredictability exacerbates the sense of unease. While heightened anxiety has been the case for many children, Johnson has not noticed this as being a dominant reaction for adults on the spectrum. In fact, many have reported feeling less anxious due to not having to comply with societal interactions. As Johnson quipped: "We don't have to justify why we're home on a Friday night because everybody is!"

And while many of us are chafing at the new regulations, Johnson commented this is ironically not as much of a stressor "as we tend to be very rule-based in general." As noted in Alex Earhart's Thoughts from a Quarantined Autistic blog, "Social distancing is kind of my default, even if it's not always my choice."

The current situation presents a valuable opportunity for better understanding autism. "Neurotypical people will often ascribe a negative connotation to an autistic person's action and not give us the benefit of the doubt," said Johnson, adding that she hopes that the new awareness will be long-lasting and result in a more empathetic society.

As an autistic mother with an autistic child, Johnson has a unique perspective on behaviours that would perplex a neurotypical parent. For instance, in discussing challenges at school, she accurately identified that her son's brain moves faster than his hand. Insights like this can lead to more effective interventions.

Johnson has also noticed a decrease in her son's anxiety during the pandemic. He is studying what he is interested in and is not stressed by social expectations. Her son has even relaxed his formerly strict eating habits. "When you take away the pressure, he is able to take chances outside of his comfort zone," she observed, adding that she had been considering homeschooling after a rocky transition to a mainstream school.

While autism advocate Temple Grandin recommended that parents "show no fear" to help autistic children cope in the pandemic, Johnson believes it is important to show a full range of emotions. "It's okay to be scared or sad. Through acknowledging feelings, children can then resolve them. Being too overprotective can invalidate emotions and might even set them back," she said.

As the guest speaker on Autism Canada's new podcast "Sharing the Spectrum" for World Autism Awareness Day (April 2), Johnson advised: "Try not to use your neurotypical lenses when interacting with an autistic person. Get new lenses, and you might be able to get a better understanding."

Listen to the Inspirations News podcast on Soundcloud, Google Play or Apple Podcasts to hear more of Johnson's thoughts.

Mindfulness 101:
Mindful listening

By *Danika Swanson*

With school and many camps cancelled this summer, we will all be home with our children. While this brings many challenges, it also provides us with the opportunity to develop new routines that prioritize supportive practices – for ourselves and our children. As a parent, I know how easy it is for a mindfulness practice to feel like just one more thing you have to do. And if you feel this way, your child will likely feel this way, too. I encourage you to find a way to make this practice something you get to do, not have to do.

Think about how you can set this time up as a special time. Is there a special place in your home you can sit? Do you have a special cushion to sit on, a shawl to wear or a candle you can light together? Younger kids especially enjoy ringing the bell, or if you use your phone, choosing the tone on your timer. Can you notice together that taking this time feels good and provides a refreshing break from screens, distractions and other demands? And if this is too much for you to do with your children, start with yourself first; you can include your children later, and in the meantime, they will benefit from your personal practice.

Starting a mindfulness practice is difficult for everyone; all of our minds wander, and it can be uncomfortable to sit and try to focus and notice how hard it is to keep our attention on one thing. I encourage you to modify practices to make them work for your children by adding movement, let them hold something in their hands to fidget with, or before you begin, provide a visual aid of expected behaviour like a picture of what children sitting mindfully look like.

Mindful listening / Mindfulness of sound

The following practice is drawn from the Mindful Schools curriculum. It provides an opportunity for short periods of paying attention on purpose, developing our ability to observe a single thing for an extended period of time. The techniques and exercises are simple, but when practiced over time, they can effectively help us develop and strengthen our mind.

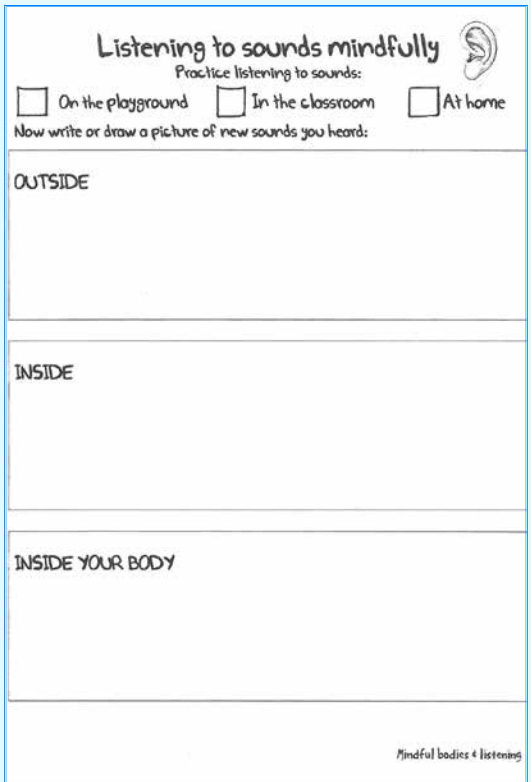
This practice focuses on being mindful of sound. It can be done with a bell or with ambient external sounds. A bell, singing bowls or vibratones work great. I also use the insight timer, a free app with a mindfulness timer with various "bell" sounds my kids like: *https://insighttimer.com/*

- *Get into a mindful posture and let your eyes close. For younger kids, you can ask them to get into their mindful bodies and put on their mindful ears*
- *Ring bell*
- *Listen to the sound from the moment it starts to the moment it ends. Ask your children to pay attention from the very first moment they hear the bell, all the way to the end, and then to raise their hand when the sound is gone*
- *Then listen to the sounds around you.*
- *Listen to sounds coming from outside the room*
- *Listen to sounds coming from inside the room*
- *Are you quiet enough to hear sounds in your body?*
- *Listen for one to two minutes*

At the end of the practice, notice how you feel. Ask your children to notice how they feel. Was it challenging or easy to keep your attention on one thing? What did you hear? Did thoughts arise while you were trying to listen to the bell? Simply notice your experience.

Visit https://vimeo.com/227542682 to see a video on mindful listening with JusTme.

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



Listening to sounds mindfully

Practice listening to sounds:

☐ On the playground ☐ In the classroom ☐ At home

Now write or draw a picture of new sounds you heard:

OUTSIDE

INSIDE

INSIDE YOUR BODY

Mindful bodies & listening

A mindfulness worksheet from the Mindfulness School Curriculum.

Learning to manage your child's tantrums

By *Stephanie Paquette*

Tantrums come in all shapes and sizes. In my work, I am often called upon to help when a student is in crisis and, as a mother, I am in the thick of parenting a very spirited and determined toddler. Tantrums are common in young children and are often caused by the frustration of boundaries set by caregivers and of not having alternative ways of expressing emotions. In older children, tantrums are frequently the result of not having learned more appropriate ways to manage their feelings. Tantrums offer caregivers an opportunity to help their child work through difficult emotions and learn self-regulation strategies.

Self-regulation refers to the ability to manage emotions and impulses. It is an important life skill and can be developed with practice. Teaching your child to self-regulate is best done by modeling the types of behaviours that you would like to see your child exhibit. For example, if your child is having a temper tantrum, responding with anger may in fact worsen your child's emotional meltdown. Although repeated emotional outbursts from children can be emotionally exhausting and exasperating, if you respond calmly and with empathy, you will not send your child into further alarm. When parents learn first to calm themselves, they will help their children avoid tantrums.

When we are calm, we are more emotionally available and in-tune with our children's needs. We can start to observe and take note of what is triggering our child's tantrums and respond accordingly. There is often a stressor that contributes to a child's tantrum. Stressors can be physical (sounds or smells), emotional (saying goodbye to a parent), cognitive (learning a new subject at school), social (friendships) and pro-social (being exposed to other people's stresses). When you have determined what the stressors are, you can then start helping your child learn to manage them. You can help them identify the physical sensations that they start to feel in their bodies when they experience stress, for example, sweaty hands, racing heartbeat or butterflies in their stomach. When children's emotions are validated by a caregiver and when they become connected to the physical sensations that are associated with an emotion, then we can give them the tools to more effectively manage the emotion.

For some children, connecting and remaining close to their caregiver can provide comfort whereas for others, they may require space and some time alone in order to feel calmer.

Breathing techniques, reading books, engaging in physical exercises, drinking water and returning to the regular routine as quickly as possible are other tools that can help children manage their emotions. When caregivers validate their children's emotions and allow them a safe place to express them, children will be more inclined to use self-regulation strategies to manage difficult feelings.

There is a parents' line that provides free professional support 24 hours a day for all issues including tantrums and meltdowns. Take a look at *www.ligneparents.com/LigneParents*

Stephanie Paquette is a behaviour management specialist at the English Montreal School Board.

(Photo, Peggy und Marco Lachmann-Anke from Pixabay)

THE COMMUNITY GIVES BACK

Young Montrealer with scoliosis gives back

By *Cindy Davis*

Emma Corbett is a spunky Kindergarten student at Merton Elementary School of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) in Côte Saint-Luc. The blue-eyed youngster loves art, gym class and playing with her friends – very much the typical chosen pastimes of a child her age. But Emma has proven to be a very special child in many ways.

Born with congenital scoliosis, causing an abnormal lateral curvature of the spine, Emma is small in stature and requires the use of a back brace and a specially padded chair to help her sit straight and alleviate pain. Since birth, she has been regularly followed at The Shriners Hospital for Children. Her family has been so moved by her care there, that every year on Emma's birthday, they ask for donations to the Shriners in lieu of gifts.

"We have so much stuff in the house, she doesn't need more so we feel that we have to give back," says Emma's mother, Cari Friedman. "We want to give back to children who are similar to Emma with orthopedic issues. The Shriners is amazing. From her X-rays to visiting with doctors, they take the time and care. I just wish we could do more for them."

To date, Emma has raised over $3,600 for the Shriners and has no plans to stop. The family has set up a foundation there in her name, and wants to expand their fundraising efforts. "It makes me feel good," says Emma, though she points out that she does still receive a few birthday presents from close family and friends.

Friedman, a teacher at John Grant High School of the EMSB, has also made it her mission to educate Emma's peers on her condition in order to demystify it. The two wrote a short book about Emma's story and presented it to her classmates early in the year, allowing the kids to then touch her brace and decorate it with stickers.

"We explained to her friends that even if she runs a bit funny sometimes and she has to sit sometimes because her hip hurts, it's okay," she says. "I really wanted the kids to see that she's just like them." Friedman notes that the school has been extremely supportive, and that Emma has become somewhat of a celebrity there. "Everybody at Merton knows Emma. Every time I drop her off, there is not one teacher or student that doesn't say 'Hi Emma.' It's a great feeling as a parent."

Since the beginning of the quarantine, Emma has been keeping busy at home doing math, French and English work, arts and crafts, dance, yoga and drama classes on Zoom. She has also been riding her bike and scooter. On Mother's Day, she made cards for the tenants of a seniors residence, and she created a poster to thank the heroes working on the frontlines in her community.

Wherever she goes, it is clear that Emma has an impact on those around her. "I'm big, bold and beautiful," she says.

Visit the Inspirations *website to read the story that Emma and her mother wrote on her experiences.*

Emma created posters to thank frontline workers at a local seniors residence impacted by COVID-19. (Photo, Cari Friedman)

Maison Shalom residents proud to be giving

By *Hindy Friedman*

The residents of the Benjamin and Vanda Treiser Maison Shalom were excited to be on the giving end recently, when they created, decorated and packed care packages for MADA Community Center this past Hanukah.

Founded in 1989, Benjamin and Vanda Treiser Maison Shalom is a residence for individuals with moderate to severe special needs. The two homes provide a family-like setting for the residents, providing care in a safe, caring and stimulating atmosphere.

Jenny Efthimiopoulos, a loving and dedicated staff member, who has been with Treiser Maison Shalom for many years, suggested that our residents embark on a giving project for Hanukah. With the help of Ellen Kogut, our dedicated Wednesday volunteer, residents painted and decorated boxes in warm, friendly colours. Some of the residents went on a shopping trip to the local pharmacy and dollar store and purchased basic toiletries and warm socks. The boxes were carefully packed and sealed and then delivered to MADA, where they were gratefully received.

Chesky Paneth and Chaim Zimlichman (standing) preparing boxes for Mada at Maison Shalom. (Photo, Maison Shalom)

We were especially proud to receive a thank you card from MADA, which is displayed prominently on our bulletin board.

Everyone, no matter their abilities, can be a giver.

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

To learn more about Maison Shalom, visit https://treisermaisonshalom.com

Nikan Nassiraei: One-armed wonder CHAMP

By *Valentina Basilicata*

Nikan Nassiraei rocking out playing his drums. (Photo, Wendy Singer)

Nikan Nassiraei, born with part of his right arm missing, excitedly zips between his spacious living room and his sunlit bedroom. He proudly displays colourful artwork and a long bridge he's built out of books for his guests to admire. Despite his obvious engineering prowess, six-year-old Nikan admits, "I want to be an archeologist when I grow up and dig up mummies."

Gingerly stepping over his scattered toys and an unfinished game of checkers, he retrieves a cardboard case with a plastic handle, shaking it happily. "This is full of Valentines," he says. He opens it and riffles through the tiny cards decorated with hearts from his kindergarten classmates at St. George's School of Montreal. He flashes an infectious smile and jokes that he has "20-hundred" friends.

On his bed is a box housing a mini black-and-white checkered guitar, the same one he's strumming in the photograph taken for the War Amps 2019 promotional calendar and on the cover of this edition of *Inspirations*. He picks it up and carries it around but isn't inspired to play a note on this particular morning.

When asked if having one arm changes the way he does things, he quickly proclaims, "I'm not different." And he's right. Like most kids, Nikan can ride a bike and a scooter with ease and loves playing soccer. He can do enough somersaults to make anyone watching dizzy. But his absolute favourite activity is swimming.

"One time I touched the hula hoops at the bottom [of the pool]. I'm in Whale level now. That's the last, last [level]. Whale is very cool," beams Nikan. "I'm getting a new 'helping hand' soon for swimming."

"Helping hand" is what Nikan and his parents call his different prostheses, which are paid for by the War Amps. He got his first one at about age two, and each costs around $6,000, explain his parents Mehrnoosh Movahed and Amir Nassiraei. Mehrnoosh is a research associate for childhood disabilities at McGill University, and Amir is a mechanical engineer with a PhD in robotics.

Despite their professional backgrounds, they were at a loss when they learned their only child was a congenital amputee. "It was a shock," says his mother. "[The doctors] didn't detect it on the ultrasound." Just one month after his birth, Nikan's family was referred to the Shriner's Hospital in Montreal, whose staff introduced them to the War Amps. He's been enrolled in the War Amps CHAMP (child amputee) program his whole life. The War Amps is a not-for-profit charitable organization seeking to improve the quality of life for Canadian amputees. It provides financial assistance for artificial limbs, peer support and information on all aspects of living with amputation.

"War Amps are so supportive and amazing. They are part of our family now," says his mother. The family looks forward to the annual War Amps regional seminars, where they attend informative talks and connect with other amputee families over the course of a weekend.

Wanting to give back to the organization that has empowered their son throughout his young life, Nikan's family donated $1,700 to the War Amps last August. They raised the funds selling Nikan's original art pieces during a Canada Day event in Côte Saint-Luc.

Back in the living room, Nikan sits at his brand new blue drum set after strapping on a prosthesis with a drumstick attached to it and rocks out for a few minutes, hair bouncing. He then runs back to his room to retrieve his adapted recorder, which he plays using another prosthesis made specifically for that instrument. Finally exhausted by the morning's flurry of activity, Nikan contentedly plops down and grabs his iPad. His parents admit they couldn't ask for more. They're amazed at all he's accomplished in just six years and are continually surprised at his energy and autonomy. "All I wanted was for him to be independent and to be happy… so we surrounded him with love," says his mom. "He's our little angel, a blessing."

I was fortunate to have met Nikan just weeks before COVID-19 swept across Quebec. The morning of our interview was fun-filled and energetic; we freely exchanged handshakes and high-fives. When I reached out to his family during the pandemic, his mother explained Nikan is missing his friends, teachers and family but he's still a busy bee. "During this quarantine time, he practiced a lot and now he can ride a bicycle without [training] wheels. He is so proud of that. He also likes planting, and grows lentil sprouts, avocado, parsley, basil, lemon seeds and apple seeds inside the house."

Valentina Basilicata is an emerging fiction writer as well as a professional wordsmith with over 15 years experience as a communications specialist and freelance journalist/editor. She is also the proud mom of two boys.

Dog Walk Ambassador happy to help out!

By *Wendy Singer*

Autism Speaks Canada's National Dog Walk Ambassador Olivier St-Amour with his dog Gizmo. Olivier is wearing his own t-shirt creation that he sells in support of the Montreal Children's Hospital. (Photo, Heather McCoy)

Autism Speaks Canada (ASC) called all pet lovers across Canada to join together for their Virtual Dog Walk on June 7. ASC's primary goal continues to focus on the needs of the community first, including support and research. But the ASC team was excited to mobilize and bring the community together. The Virtual Dog Walk provided an opportunity to celebrate the companionship and unconditional love of dogs (pets in general) especially during this time when we have to practice physical distancing.

Participants across the country posted their videos and photos on social media to share their Virtual Dog Walk experience, whether it was a distance walk, playing in the backyard or showing tricks. Sponsored incentive gifts were awarded for various levels of donations that participants received.

This year's National Virtual Dog Walk Ambassador Olivier St-Amour was honoured to accept the role. A student at Collège de Montréal, this 13-year-old was previously diagnosed with ADHD, impulsivity and anxiety. Further assessments uncovered an Asperger diagnosis at the age of 11. This late diagnosis answered many questions Olivier and his family had had over the years and allowed him to have a better understanding of his strengths and challenges.

Olivier has fundraised and participated in the past two ASC dog walks in Montreal with his energetic and spunky poodle Gizmo, who provides him with unconditional love and friendship.

Promo 21:

A t-shirt printing company with a social impact

By ***Randy Pinsky***

More than a promotional t-shirt company, Promo 21 is a Montreal start-up with a purpose. Opening for business in the summer of 2019 in the Chabanel garment district, Promo 21 hires adults with intellectual challenges and trains them in the intricate art of silk screening.

The impetus to start Promo 21 developed from Martin Gould's realization that there were few employment venues willing to accommodate adults with special needs such as his girlfriend's son, Aaron, resulting in many capable individuals languishing at home.

When he came across a New York printing company that employs adults with autism, he knew he had hit upon a winner. Beyond creating visually appealing memorabilia, printing was the ideal venue for this clientele as the process involves repeated - yet challenging - steps. "This is not just about printing t-shirts; this is a tool to help Aaron and other adults like him grow," explained Gould. "Because more orders equal more job opportunities, more jobs mean less adults staying home."

Agence Ometz validated the idea and has helped place several of Promo 21's employees. Rather than the anticipated full year to get started, Promo 21 opened shop with five employees in July 2019 - merely five months after the initial research and planning. The company has now tripled in staff with 15 part-time and full-time employees overseen by a neurotypical supervisor, and has completed numerous impressive contracts.

Their mission is well exemplified in their logo, designed by Jason Goldsmith of The Big Blue Hug glass paint art fame. The puzzle piece reflects the international symbol of the complexity of the autism spectrum, and the '21' is intended to sensitize people to the reality that publicly funded support services end at adulthood.

Promo 21 job coach Katherine Maharaj and veteran silk screener Tommy demonstrate the art of printing promotional shirts.

From printing shirts and sweatpants to tote bags and hoodies, Promo 21 has worked with dance and sports teams, organizations and companies. Ranging from customized projects to huge rush orders, the company has fine-tuned efficiency with fulfillment as the employees are part of the process from start to finish. They also now have a packaging division and match each individual to where they are best fit. Promo 21 partners with Wagar Adult Education Centre of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), Summit School and the Centre de ressources éducatives et pédagogiques (CREP) and has welcomed some stagiaires from their internship programs.

Veteran staff members Tommy and Sabrina manage the printing component. A graphic design graduate from Rosemount Technology Centre of the EMSB, Tommy had previously worked in video-game testing but found full-time employment difficult. Promo 21 challenges his skills and keeps him engaged while offering predictability in the process.

A Microsoft Excel expert and graduate of Ometz's Skills Enhancement Training program, Sabrina oversees the inventory and orders. She noted how employment opportunities such as this are not common. Businesses such as Promo 21 are particularly well-suited for people with autism; she mentioned, for instance, that she is sensitive to noise but comments, "Here people don't judge when I have to walk away. They just let me do what I need to do."

While operations came to a halt in March due to COVID-19, Gould is anxious to get the team back to work. They are equipped with the necessary personal protective equipment and sanitizers, and have adapted their workspaces to accommodate social distancing. Gould even has plans to expand the operations into other areas of production.

Promo 21 is about teaching skills, fostering empowerment, and helping young adults with autism develop both personally and professionally. "Everyone has an 'ism,' and we just work with that," said Gould.

The motivation to starting this project was to break the isolation of young adults over the age of 21 who were at home all day long with nothing to do. "Having self-isolated for months, we have now all lived a day in their lives," said Gould. "We have experienced exactly what these young adults were living before they were hired at Promo 21. I plan to share this message as we move forward."

Randy Pinsky is a freelance writer who has edited several scientific and medical articles and who recently completed an extensive report for a McGill conference on disability rights.

LaurenHill student triumphs at provincial Scholastic Challenge

By ***Mike Cohen***

Fourteen-year old Adam Coleman, of LaurenHill Academy's Junior Campus in Saint-Laurent, is this year's Quebec Provincial Champion of the "Scholastic Challenge" contest.

The Scholastic Challenge is a Canada-wide contest for Grade 8 students designed as an enrichment activity to stimulate students' interest in knowledge, thinking and learning, and to offer a challenge to top-achieving students. The contest has been offered nation-wide since 1998.

The test consists of 100 on-line questions, and lasts one hour. The six categories covered in the test are: General Knowledge (food, art, sports, music, current events, entertainment, mythology, etc.), Language and Literature, History, Geography, Science and Math.

LaurenHill Academy invites 30 of its top-achieving Grade 8 students to participate in this contest each year. The LaurenHill students have always performed well. This is the fifth time that they have had a provincial champion, notes Guidance Counsellor Sherilyn Bell.

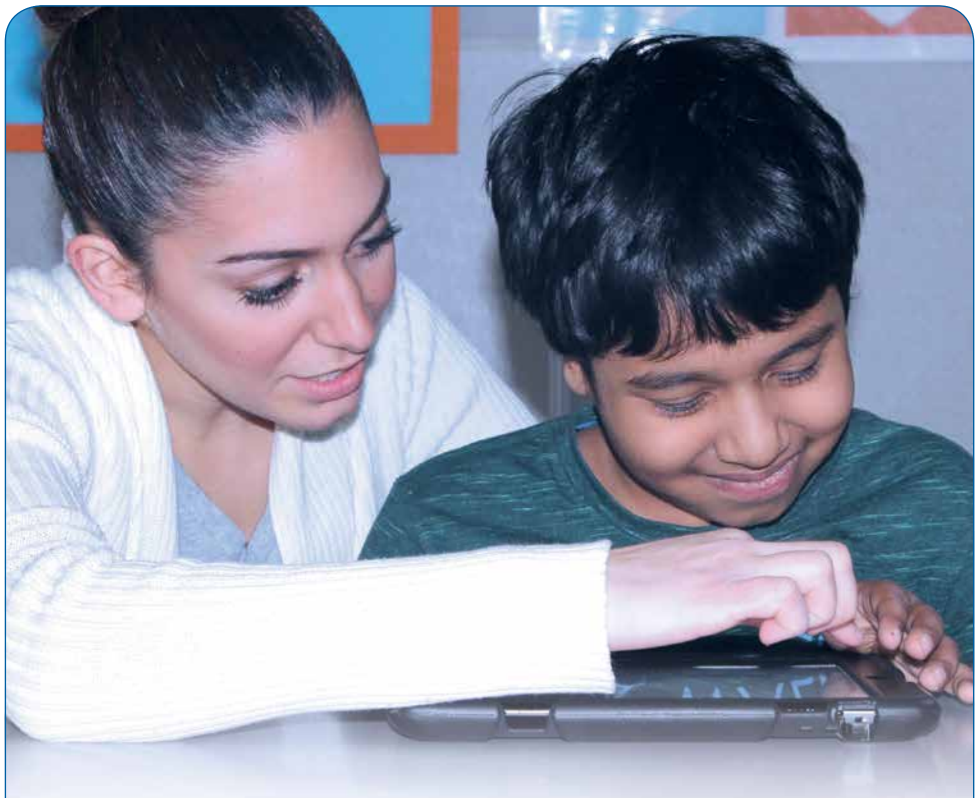
Adam is an honour-roll student in LaurenHill Academy's STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics) Program. Prior to attending LaurenHill Academy, Coleman was a student at Cedarcrest Elementary School, also in St. Laurent. Upon hearing about his success, Adam responded: "I'm surprised, but I also feel proud of my accomplishment. The LaurenHill STEAM Program has provided me with an enriched knowledge base, which I was able to draw on while I was competing in the contest. The STEAM Program is a great stimulator of intellectual curiosity, and I look forward to continuing in this program during the rest of my high school education."

Anthony Coleman said that his son was diagnosed with high functioning autism at age 4. "He was reading by age 2, before he could even speak," he said. "He would read out every number plate of cars he saw passing by. My wife and I are extremely proud of our son's achievement and hope he can be an inspiration to others in their pursuits of academic excellence."

"Winning this contest means a lot to me," says Adam. "It put me one step closer to success in achieving my goal of becoming a computer programmer and engineer. This is my biggest achievement so far and makes me believe I can reach even bigger accomplishments. I'm honored to represent my family, teachers and the school who helped me get to this goal."

For information about the "Scholastic Challenge," which also has a national contest for Grade 6 students, visit www.schoolschallenge.com.

Adam Coleman is this year's Quebec Provincial Champion of the Scholastic Challenge contest.



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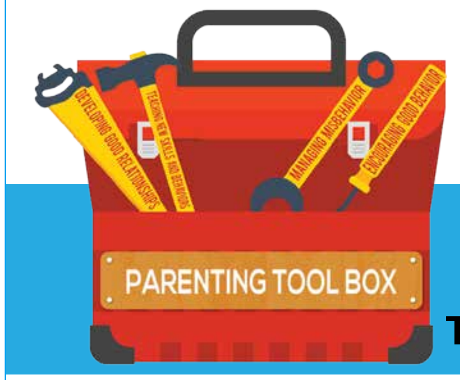
DEVELOPING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS
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MANAGING MISBEHAVIOR
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PARENTING TOOL BOX

A new teaching tool facilitates experiential learning through growing plants

By *Jay Jones-Doyle*

The art of teaching has changed in recent years, in large part catalyzed by the introduction of pedagogical technologies in the classroom. Recently, three special needs schools – L.I.N.K.S. and John Grant High Schools, and Galileo Adult Education Centre, all of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) – adopted a new teaching technology to help their students acquire key skillsets. This teaching tool is the Nutritower. Self-watering and producing its own light, the Nutritower is a clean, hydroponic system which doesn't use soil, pesticides or herbicides. It takes up no more than four square feet of floor space to simultaneously grow up to 32 individual plants, yielding more than 250 fresh fruits and vegetables per year.

I was lucky enough to chat with the teachers making use of the Nutritower at these schools. I wanted to understand how the tower has been integrated into the curriculum/classroom experience, and its impact on both the students and teachers alike.

Gail Bernstein, teacher at L.I.N.K.S. High School, explained that the Nutritower has been integrated into the school's DÉFIS Program (Démarche éducatif favorisant l'Intégration sociale), which focuses on functional academics, preparation for the job market, and includes project-based experiential learning. The Nutritower is dynamically incorporated into her curriculum both as a standalone pedagogical tool as well as through a partnership with the EMSB's St. Pius X Career Centre's Culinary Institute, located in the same building as L.I.N.K.S.

Daily tasks to maintain the Nutritower include measuring, calculating growth, checking the water level, and adding nutrients. Bernstein explains that it inspires her students to value the hard work it takes to build a small enterprise. "My students work together as a team, encourage each other, problem-solve and smile. The Nutritower is the perfect tool to implement a cross-curricular element to teaching as students quickly realize that everything they are learning – math, science, technology – has an important role in this venture," she said.

When the fresh produce is ready, the budding L.I.N.K.S. entrepreneurs sell it to budding chefs at Pius who, in turn, create tasty dishes with local, fresh ingredients.

L.I.N.K.S. students David Mouharzel, Matthew Costa, Emilio Ciale and Leanne Nguyen are seen tending to their Nutritower in class. Missing from the photo are Dimitris Friskas and Shihid Zuhair. (Photo, L.I.N.K.S. High School)

Marisa Guerrieri, teacher at Galileo, integrates the Nutritower into multiple aspects of everyday teaching. She reported that her students have been extremely happy and excited to interact with and care for the tower, and that the fresh produce harvested is incorporated into their cooking class. "The Nutritower brings such positive energy to the classroom. The light and sound of it have helped my students diminish anxiety, and that has had a soothing effect on the classroom," she said.

English teacher Derek Skeie of John Grant uses the Nutritower with a class of four students with autism. He has found it to be a very impactful, hands-on tool in teaching his students how to understand and follow instructions. The fresh produce grown is shared with their cafeteria. "The lessons learned through this may be directly applicable to future work or personal contexts," he added.

Research has found that experiential learning approaches tend to yield high rates of engagement across larger proportions of students, which in turn yields higher rates of core-concept retention. That said, finding effective tools that both facilitate student connection to immediate learning objectives and also to overarching life skills is not a simple feat. As classrooms begin to increase everyday use of effective experiential learning tools like the Nutritower, the process of "learning" may become more enjoyable and impactful for all involved.

Jay Jones-Doyle helps people and organizations achieve sustainable and meaningful success, one win at a time. He has cerebral palsy and is the proud father of a 16-year-old.

A Horse Tale Rescue: Who is rescuing who?

By *Lise Sandstrom*

Fifteen minutes from the West Island and at the end of a country road, you will be greeted by the sight of horses grazing peacefully in their paddocks. The red "AHT Rescue" sign confirms that you have arrived at A Horse Tale (AHT) Rescue, a registered charity and a magical, peaceful place that currently provides a secure and loving home to 13 rescue horses.

AHT rescues, rehabilitates and rehomes horses in need. In offering them a second chance, the horses demonstrate that they still have a lot to "give," and do so to AHT volunteers and the community. Horses are naturally empathetic and the benefits of simply being around them is invaluable. In the company of these large sentient beings, one feels calm, relaxed and in the moment (mindful).

In 2017, the AHT Experience Program (AHTE) was created to give back to the community by sharing the pleasures and benefits of "guided equine contact." This unique program offers an opportunity for special and specific needs groups (affiliated with an accredited organization), to interact with their horses in a safe, nurturing and structured environment.

Together with the visiting group's coordinator, the AHTE coordinator carefully plans the visit which includes guided small-group interactions with the AHT horses, and for some, an additional opportunity to help with various tasks at the rescue. AHTE offers one time or regular visits based on the groups' needs. We also coordinate visits for larger groups.

Over the course of the pandemic, the horses have been doing very well, receiving regular visits from a minimum number of volunteers who follow all needed safety protocols to take care of the horses. We look forward to offering modified open house visits, respecting all COVID-19 measures, and to safely accommodate visitors with special needs when the time is right. In the interim, we stay in touch virtually on the AHT Facebook page. We also plan to offer equine contact services to the pandemic heroes who have been on the front lines of the pandemic.

The life-enhancing value of having contact with our equine residents at AHT are not soon forgotten.

For information about A Horse Tale, their visiting hours and open houses, visit www.ahtrescue.org or contact Lise@ahorsetale.org.

Lise Sandstrom is the coordinator of AHT Experience Program.

Cheyenne and Zephyr enjoy their leisure days and meeting visitors at A Horse Tale Rescue. (Photo, Lori Rubin)

NOTEBOOK

By *Wendy Singer*

My calendar for March and April was overbooked with events that I was looking forward to attending and reporting on. It was disappointing when, one by one, events that the community worked so hard to plan were cancelled, like **Steven Atme**'s much anticipated T*he Power of One* premiere and Montreal Autism in Motion's conference, the Spectrum Works Job Fair and the Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities workshop with **Sarah Ward.** We missed the C.A.R.E. Centre's fundraising dinner, the Social Tree's congress, the Lester B. Pearson School Board's resource fair and many more.

Yet, amidst the challenges, the special needs community has shown collective resilience, moving swiftly online to offer services, workshops, support groups and lectures. I have attended many events over the past few months from my home office, covering topics that we would not have imagined discussing a few months prior, like "the new normal" or "the five stages of grieving." This shift has given us new ways to connect, learn and cope together, and reach beyond our communities as issues of concern for the special needs community are addressed, and opportunities for hope and change emerge.

To speak to the times, in this edition of the Notebook, I share only a few pre-COVID-19 events. Instead, I too shift, from sharing the social to more personal stories. I hope you enjoy it!

Danielle Kasner, Max Kasner, Carly Goodman, Elizabeth Wiener, Max Levy and Shelly Christensen at The Gelber Centre on February 13. (Photo, Federation CJA)

On February 12, Federation CJA hosted a three-hour workshop led by Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month founder **Shelly Christensen**. Amongst the many messages she imparted that day, Christensen encouraged community leaders to work together to move inclusion from discussion to action, and to involve stakeholders in every step of their inclusion plan. *(To read more about Christensen's presentation, consult our Winter 2020 edition.)*

The third hour of the workshop included a panel discussion where guests **Elizabeth Wiener**, founder of Wise Women Canada and mental health advocate, and **Max Kasner**, his sister **Danielle Kasner** and **Max Levy** shared their experiences. They educated attendees on the challenges and stigma they face on a daily basis, sharing how upsetting it is to be excluded for no real reason and how simple it is to remove barriers to inclusion. Max Kasner shared his thoughts on how living with a developmental disability affects his life. "It makes me very interesting. I have a disability but I don't let it get in my way." Kasner is an I Can Dream Theatre star, a member of the Shira Choir and a Friendship Revolution leader. His sister Danielle urged leaders to fight now for inclusion and spoke on behalf of sibling-caregivers and their concerns for the future of their loved ones.

The community mourns the passing of Steve Bletas

On May 6, the community said goodbye to **Steve Bletas**. He was the first Chair of the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board (SWLSB), where he sat from 1998 to 2012, and a member of the Board of Directors of the Societé de transport de Laval since 2015. He also sat on the Board of the Centre de santé et de services sociaux de Laval and the Sir Wilfrid Laurier Foundation, the Executive Committee of the Quebec English School Boards Association and was a member of the American Hellenic Educational Progressive Association.

"While education was Steve's passion, his professional experience within structures such as the school board, as well as personal health challenges made him an ideal advocate for the special needs community. Ultimately, he was appointed, and deservedly so, to the Societé de Transport de Laval's board of directors, where he played an integral role in improving accessibility services for several years," said his good friend **Nick Katalifos**, principal of Wagar Adult Education Centre and chair if Giant Steps School. "Even with all of his professional accomplishments, there is no doubt he was most proud of his kids."

Bletas was a guest columnist in the Spring/Summer 2012 edition of *Inspirations*, where he shared the challenges he was facing due to serious health issues, particularly spinal stenosis. He explained how the challenges of becoming a wheelchair user prompted him to make a conscious decision to put his disability into perspective. "The initial news of what I was facing was devastating, and I rapidly discovered that people with mobility issues have a great deal to contend with. Even in a society as modern and advanced as our own, we have not done enough to facilitate individuals with physical impairments, and most locations are not wheelchair friendly," he wrote.

"Determination and tenacity," he wrote, kept him going and doing what he loved to do serving SWLSB constituents and the English-speaking community of Quebec. He advocated for students and people with disabilities with heightened sensitivity and awareness. Bletas' closing remarks remain relevant today: "While the road ahead will not always be an easy one and indeed, may be an uphill battle at times, it will nonetheless always point forward."

We join together in sharing our deepest sympathies with the Bletas family, the SWLSB, the STL and all of those that he touched.

Steve Bletas.
(Photo, Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board)

Let's Get Going! teams up with *Inspirations*

Marcie Balaban, founder of Let's Get Going!, is an expert sales consultant and business matchmaker. For the past 18 years, she has been coordinating pairings of entrepreneurs and corporate executives by arranging small boardroom meetings and VIP lunches with owners or upper management of companies. The idea is to make good matches and create direct meetings between organizations that have a common purpose.

In March, Balaban's meetings went online, to great success. "Since the pandemic, my business has evolved in ways I never expected," said Balaban, excited that her clients are embracing regular Zoom meetings and continue to connect.

This year, Balaban is honouring *Inspirations* as a Let's Get Going! Making a Difference organization. In doing so, she has provided us a platform on her website and a voice in her corporate relationship building meetings.

In searching for organizations to feature in Making a Difference, Balaban is initially drawn to leaders that she develops a connection with, similar to the way she seeks out business partners. She is particularly pleased to be giving back to children with special needs through her donations to *Inspirations.*

Marcie Balaban.
(Photo, Lawrence Clemen Photography)

We have been attending Balaban's meetings and are impressed with her acumen and wisdom in nurturing partnerships. In these meetings, we share *Inspirations* and the concerns of the special needs community. This outreach is invaluable to us, and we thank Balaban for seeing the merit in our work, supporting the special needs community, and providing us this opportunity to educate and match up with like-minded executives from all parts of corporate life. *To learn more about Let's Get Going!, visit https://letsgetgoing.ca/*

Lew Lewis retires after an illustrious 53-year career

Lew Lewis (second from the left) with his daughter Liane, wife Beatrice and son Shawn at his retirement dinner at Le Crystal on January 30. (Photo, Lew Lewis)

On October 18, after a remarkable 53-year career in public education for the English Montreal School Board and the Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal, including 47 years within the Student Services department, **Lew Lewis** retired as director of Student Services.

A psychologist by profession, Lewis worked tirelessly to support his team of professionals as they helped students overcome psychological, emotional, social, academic and physical difficulties and develop their sense of responsibility, autonomy, initiative and feeling of belonging to their school and community.

Lewis co-founded *Inspirations* with Mike Cohen 12 years ago and remained active as a consulting editor until his retirement. He was always available to provide his support and for that, we are immensely grateful. We will miss his guidance and thank him for his contribution in growing *Inspirations* into the resource that it is today.

On January 30, Lewis was celebrated at Le Crystal Reception Hall in Saint-Laurent at a warm and lively retirement dinner. Master of Ceremonies Mike Cohen kept guests laughing with tongue-in-cheek humour. Lewis was serenaded by the Student Services choir's rendition of Elton John's "Your Song," rewritten with personalized lyrics, and found it touching. A team of specialists (psychologists, guidance counsellors, occupational therapists, special education consultants, spiritual and community animators, speech-language pathologists, to name a few of the professional services that the department offers) conducted a Multidisciplinary Team Assessment on Lewis, which he described as "very humorous and especially accurate!"

"When I look back after 53 years of service in the field of education, I can say that it was a great learning experience. I feel so fulfilled on both a professional and personal level," shared Lewis. "I will fondly cherish the close connections I made with the wonderful Student Services staff, administrative building personnel and my dedicated management colleagues."

Prior to the onset of the pandemic, Lewis traveled to Australia. He hopes to further his professional development and engage in professional counselling when the time is right. Mostly, he looks forward to spending more time with his family.

The Student Services Department welcomes **Julie René de Cotret** as the new director of Student Services. Having served as Assistant Director for over nine years under Lewis' direction, she is well-prepared for the role. The department also welcomes **Sabrina Petrocco** as the new assistant director.

Peter Hall welcomes new principal to Côte Vertu campus

Valérie Arsenault with her children Roseline and Theodore at their home in Prévost. (Photo, Valérie Arsenault)

This past school year, École Peter Hall (PH) School welcomed **Valérie Arsenault** as the new principal of Administration and Social Services of their Côte Vertu campus. Along with **Marie-Claude Forest**, pedagogical principal, Arsenault leads a team of 100 teachers and attendants at this specialized school for students with intellectual disabilities, autism or disorders related to psychopathology.

Prior to her arrival at PH, Arsenault worked in leadership roles at École Montessori international de Montréal, Pensionnat du Saint-Nom-de-Marie and spent 10 years at Selwyn House School. While Arsenault had not worked with special needs students before, she was sensitized; her mother is disabled and her 12-year-old son has autism.

Inspired by the hands-on, team-focused leadership of Hal Hannaford, headmaster of Selwyn House, Arsenault has spent her first year at PH getting to know the staff and students and cultivating team spirit. She declared January and February as "self-care" months, organizing a variety of activities that encouraged this staff of givers to care for themselves first.

"Ms. Arsenault has brought a breath of fresh air to our school, and it is oxygenating the staff," shared **Leslee Shaheen**, a teacher at PH for over 34 years. "She has a rapport with staff, students, bus drivers and all the attendants. She brings a smile to our faces."

President Director General of PH **Jean Laliberté** describing his new hire as a real coup. "The Peter Hall environment is completely different for Valérie. The work we do here is difficult," he said. "She has already formed an excellent partnership with her colleague Marie-Claude Forest and is working closely with the students and all levels of staff. She is a fast learner, intelligent, a hard worker and most importantly, is loyal and devoted, and we are delighted to welcome her to our school."

"At a school like PH, the staff really need to rally together and feel supported," said Arsenault. "It is a tremendous experience to lead such a large group and work with this clientele. It is my goal to make them all shine."

Heaven honoured with Lieutenant Governor's Youth Medal

Bradley Heaven and Dan O'Connor. (Photo, All Access Life)

Congratulations to **Bradley Heaven** for being awarded the Lieutenant Governor's Youth Medal, awarded by Quebec's Lieutenant Governor to students who "demonstrate a sustained voluntary action at the community and social levels."

Heaven, 23, attended John Rennie High School of the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) and graduated from Dawson College in 2019 in Social Science. During his CEGEP days, he co-founded All Access Life with his aid, friend and business partner **Dan O'Connor**.

This non-profit connects people with varying special needs across the world to life-changing technological products. The dynamic duo review and report on new and exciting products in a fun and engaging way.

Born with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy, Heaven is non-verbal and uses a wheelchair. He now communicates through the use of his Tobii 4C eye tracker. A Surface Book 2 tracks his eye movements to type on a keyboard and produce speech. This technology was gifted to Heaven in 2018 by the March of Dimes Canada.

"I was overwhelmed with emotions when I found out that I received this prestigious medal. I am really honored to be selected to receive it because of all my hard work and determination," shared Heaven in an email. "There are no limits to what you can achieve. I hope that people with disabilities see this and are motivated to do their best. I want them to see that anything is possible! I want everyone to see that inclusion needs to be up front and centre for the world to actually have no boundaries."

We also congratulate Eital Houedakor, student at Beurling Academy of the LBPSB, who was also award the Lieutenant Governor's Youth Medal. Read more about Houedakor on p. 9 of this edition.

Polaris Enterprise provides employment hope for autistic adults

By *Nick Katalifos*

In a previous edition of *Inspirations,* I addressed some of the challenges faced by autistic adults when attempting to enter the workplace. The statistics remain a major concern as approximately 85 percent of autistic people remain unemployed. There have been some pockets of success, but the stark reality is that more programs are needed that are specifically designed to recruit, train and ultimately employ individuals who have a great deal to offer to employers and, by extension, communities everywhere.

The fundamental right to employment and its direct effect on independence as well as self-esteem is well documented. Indeed, most people would agree that the ability to support oneself has a profound effect on mental health and overall well-being. With this basic principle in mind, several organizations came together to launch Polaris Enterprise, an industry-based autism spectrum disorder adult education and employment initiative. The project includes the Public Health Agency of Canada, Loblaw (Weston Canada), Giant Steps School and Resource Centre, Wagar Adult Education Centre of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), and the Transforming Autism Care Consortium (TACC), which is based at the Montreal Neurological Institute and Hospital.

Inspired by the Walgreens initiative in the US – the world's first mass scale, inclusive employment initiative for people with a wide variety of disabilities including autism – the program is based at Wagar and offers students bilingual employment readiness and vocational training. The training includes job sampling and fieldwork placement and is designed to prepare students with autism or an intellectual disability (aged 21 and older) for general or job-specific employment with Loblaw Companies Ltd, in their distribution centre or retail environment.

To ensure the success of the initiative, Andre Pereira, the project manager from Giant Steps who oversees the program, flew to South Carolina to visit the original Walgreens distribution centre that implemented the initiative in 2007, as well as to meet with Randy Lewis, retired senior vice president who pioneered the hiring policy. Several of the original employees whose families had relocated from across the United States to provide them with this opportunity spoke about the company culture and how it had transformed their lives. The visit and tour of the facility also offered invaluable information regarding the needs of major employers as well as what steps had been taken to better support autistic employees.

Once at Wagar, students will work on social and work-appropriate skills, be introduced to other adults on the spectrum who are successfully employed, and meet monthly online with professionals from a number of organizations. Under the supervision of a Wagar teacher and Jennifer Campbell (special education consultant in EMSB's Adult Education and Vocational Services), as well as two employment support specialists, students in the program will benefit from the use of modern training tools which will include virtual tours of their future work environments.

Finally, students registered in the program will be able to hone their skills in the cafeteria at Wagar where, for training purposes, a small section will be transformed by Loblaw into a "mini-market" to replicate their retail environment.

With the current COVID-19 crisis, every precaution and protocol will of course be respected, and timelines may change as a result. Having stated this, interested students are encouraged to contact Jennifer Campbell at *jcampbell1@emsb.qc.ca* to register (projected start is September), as spaces are limited and demand is expected to be high.

Randy Lewis, retired Senior VP at Walgreens and Andre Pereira, Polaris Enterprise project manager, join Thomas Biggers,warehouse employee, on a tour of the Anderson, South Carolina Walgreens distribution centre. (Photo, Rick Marrone)

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

DFAC experts untangle financial assistance programs for Canadians with special needs

By *Elaine Cohen*

Disability Financial Assistance Corporation/Société d'aide financière aux personnes handicapées (DFAC-SAFP) serves Canadian children and adults with special needs who may be eligible for federal and provincial government benefits. Established close to a decade ago, the bilingual, Quebec-based company's benefits specialists, tax lawyers, accounting experts, and other experienced professionals work to ensure clients receive the maximum amount of benefits to which they are entitled. Aside from a minimal application fee, DFAC does not charge any money to apply. DFAC is compensated with a percentage of the benefit only once the client receives it.

The company specializes in acquiring financial assistance for people with autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), developmental learning delays, intellectual, physical, mental illness (depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder), vision, neurological conditions and other chronic disorders, according to Isaac Hoch, director of Communications. He discovered DFAC several years ago when seeking support for a family member. Hoch was so inspired that he became active and subsequently sought affiliation within the company. Eager to sensitize the special needs population, Hoch has welcomed a role in business development and marketing.

Tax credits and child benefits are a sampling of potential resources. DFAC alerts clients to what's available and what's new, researching government benefits and ensuring that the client's benefits are maximized. It also supports disability advocacy.

"We've developed a particular niche for [beneficiaries with] autism or ADHD," Hoch explains. To gain acceptance, it is necessary to study the particular criteria and comply with government regulations, fill out specific forms, and provide answers that state precisely what the government wants to know. He refers to "hidden disabilities" (such as anxiety or ADHD) as grey areas where it is difficult for one to figure out how to respond to the government criteria. For Quebec provincial disability benefits, simply indicating an auditory processing disorder may not suffice, whereas joining it with the negative effect of a hearing loss that has plummeted 50 percent may prove more effective. "We have a very high success rate, well over 90 percent for close to 700 clients."

People are often unaware of what information is applicable to each application, but DFAC guides them throughout the process and can help the client collect retroactive benefits going back up to 10 years. DFAC takes extra care to ensure that all benefits have been claimed. They become the client's representative and communicate with agencies. If a client is already receiving benefits, DFAC can ensure that those benefits are being maximized.

Hoch describes two recent examples in which clients received credit as a result of DFAC's efforts. In one instance, a nine-year-old child with diagnosis of ADHD, a conduct disorder and a possible opposition disorder received retroactive benefits in the amount of $11,212. In another instance, a 13-year-old diagnosed with ADHD, a learning disability and a conduct disorder received $20,965 of retroactive benefits.

For information about DFAC, call 514-937-4223 or 1-855-382-3322, or email isaac@dfac.ca or visit www.dfac.ca.

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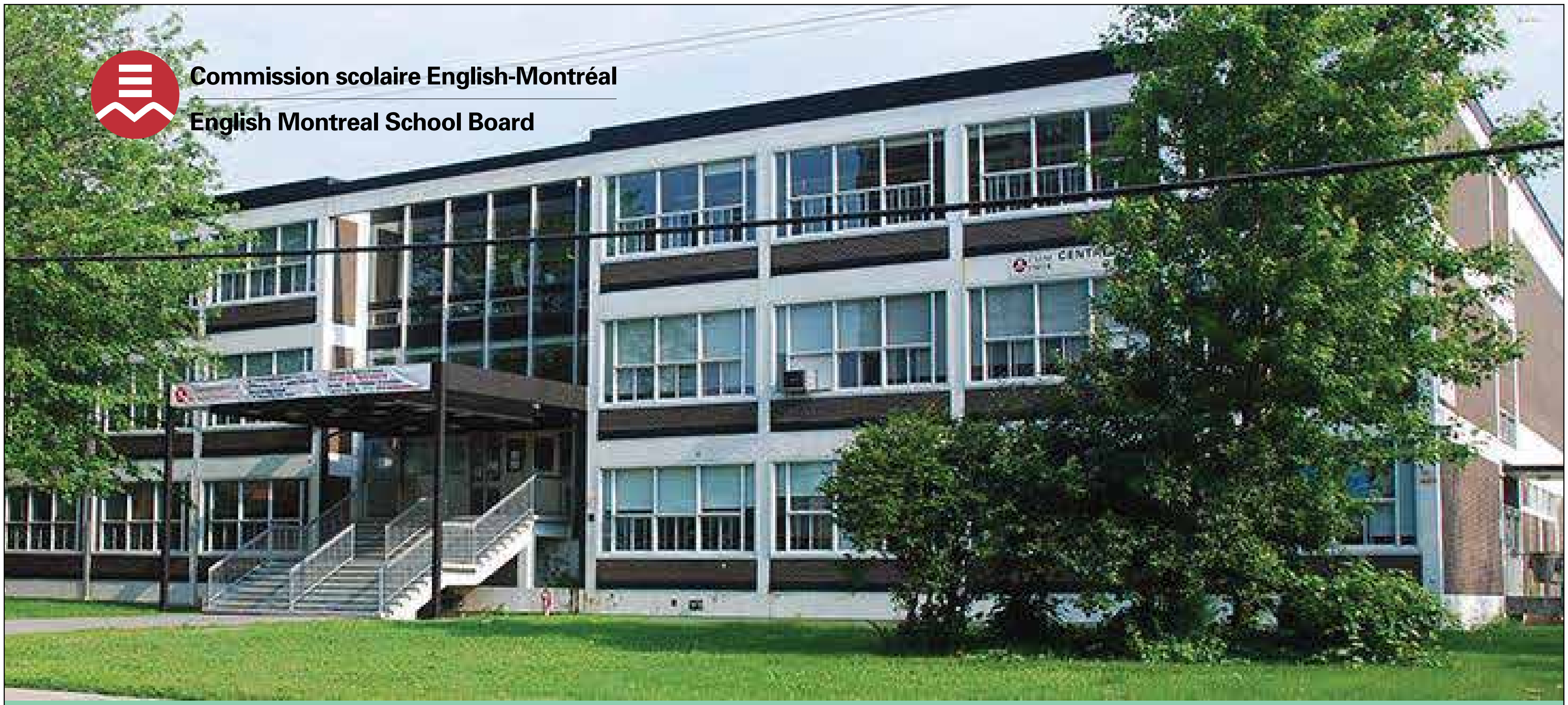

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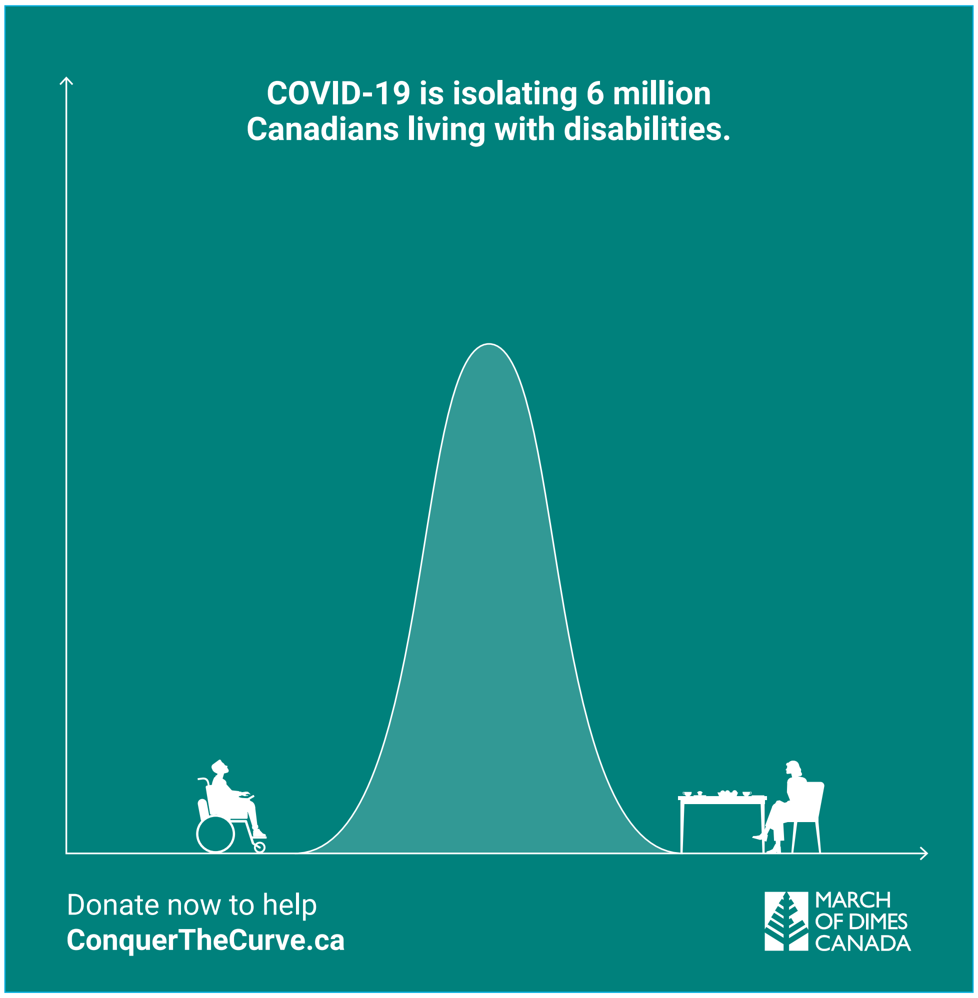
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ASD teacher and behaviour technician at EMS shed light on effect of pandemic

By *Elaine Cohen*

Teacher Alana Goodings and her daughters Isabelle McRae (left) and Mila McRae (right), both students at Edward Murphy, share their rainbow drawing. (Photo, Alana Goodings)

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) teacher Alana Goodings and behaviour technician Christopher Simeone, along with colleagues at Edward Murphy Elementary School (EMS) in eastern Montreal, sought innovative paths to provide pedagogical support and make the transition as smooth as possible during school closures caused by COVID-19. Change is difficult for most, but can be especially challenging for those with special needs.

Through training and experience, educators are accustomed to adapting to a myriad of special needs from their students, but this unprecedented global pandemic surpassed them all.

Goodings teaches the ASD senior elementary class (grades 4 to 6) at EMS. While schools were closed, she interacted online with students and parents. "I was in contact with them daily, scheduled morning meetings and posted them on our ClassDojo platform," she said. Goodings collaborated with Megan Pimentel, who teaches the ASD junior elementary class (grades 1 to 3). "Megan is great to work with, and we have created accessible modified materials that our students can do as well as posted visuals and videos plus added hard copies to a Google drive so parents could print them." The teachers dropped the hard copy packs off at homes where resources were limited.

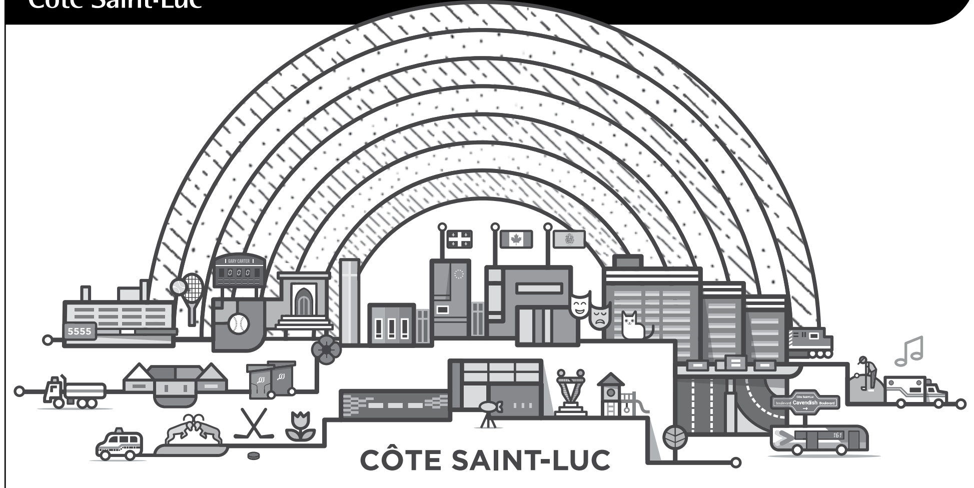
Goodings received positive feedback from parents. Sometimes, parents sought input on situations that arose at home. She created visuals with whimsical cartoons that capture the children's attention and relay the message. "I'm grateful to have been able to connect with my students through Dojo, phone and video with Microsoft Teams," said Goodings, who used her own programs and devices.

A proud mother of three, Goodings credits her two youngest children, Mila, 7, and Isabella, 5, for their assistance and participation in the projects. The girls are in the French Immersion program at EMS. Regarding the re-opening of school, Goodings sees it from a parental and a pedagogical perspective and wants to make sure the environment is safe. She observes a dire need for more supplies to avoid communal and model sharing. Now, teachers can't put out a box of facial tissues or a package of markers for everyone to share. ASD students rely on routine and are accustomed to communal seating and close contact, which is no longer feasible. Schedules need to be thought out and put into practice. Even handwashing involves more time and supervision. Children need to wait for turns at the sink and carry out the process.

Alana Goodings and Megan Pimentel dressed up as emojis for Halloween last year. (Photo, Mila McRae)

Behaviour technician Christopher Simeone assumed his post at Edward Murphy in 2014. He's a graduate of Vanier College's Special Care Counselling program. During the COVID-19 crisis, Simeone, along with the EMS team, delivered food packages to families. He also worked at one of the emergency day care centres.He has observed fear and uncertainty triggered by the pandemic and compares it to war. On a positive note, he added, "In the end, this shines a light on our flexibility as educators."

Follow Alana Goodings on her Instagram account @teachingforall to see some of the videos capsules she has shared during distance learning.



Big Brothers Big Sisters of West Island connect virtually

By *Wendy Singer*

Donna (mentor) and Austin (mentee) enjoy some time together. (Photo, Big Brothers Big Sisters of West Island)

Many children and youth in Canada face adversity in the best of times, let alone during a pandemic. Big Brothers Big Sisters is a Canadian non-profit that matches young people with volunteer mentors who help to ignite their power and potential. Over the last few months, Big Brothers Big Sisters of West Island has run their traditional face-to-face program virtually, and it's been a smooth transition.

"We match youth that are struggling due to difficult family situations, socioeconomic issues, problems at school or trouble making friends due to a special need," said Megan Semenchuk, executive director of Big Brothers Big Sisters of West Island. "The first thing I notice in the youth is an increase in self-confidence and self-esteem. They know that they have somebody in their corner, and for many it's the first time they have that (except for mom and dad!). And our volunteers report a great sense of fulfillment."

Big Brothers Big Sisters of West Island continues their intake and search for volunteers during the pandemic. Volunteers must agree to a one-year commitment, begin virtually and transition to the traditional in-person relationship once public health directives allow for in-person meetings. Matches are made based on compatibility and while Big Brothers Big Sisters requires a commitment of one year, they hope the relationship will last a lifetime.

To enroll a young person or to apply to volunteer (a rigorous application process will be required for volunteers), visit westisland.bigbrothersbigsisters.ca or call 514-538-6100.

Pensatout, l'outil indispensable pour tous les jeunes en transition à la vie adulte!

Par *Laurence Leser*

La transition n'est pas toujours un passage simple pour les jeunes. En fait, beaucoup ne savent pas ce qu'est la transition et ne s'y préparent pas ou peu. La transition c'est non seulement un passage des soins pédiatriques aux soins adultes, mais c'est aussi une étape complète de la vie d'un jeune. Les jeunes ont besoin d'être accompagnés. Tous s'entendent pour dire que le manque de préparation à la transition peut avoir toutes sortes de conséquences sur la santé et la qualité de vie de nos jeunes.

Outre la santé, les jeunes doivent arriver à cerner leurs besoins, réunir les renseignements et le matériel nécessaires aux soins, établir des routines et de bonnes habitudes de vie, porter attention aux signaux annonciateurs de complications et savoir y réagir, planifier des rendez-vous, sa vie sociale, ses études… autant d'aspects pris en charge par Pensatout, un outil qui allie fonctions « aide-mémoire », outils de planification et ressources pratiques sur une plateforme dont les jeunes raffolent, leur appareil mobile.

Pensatout est un site Web mobile convivial et ludique pensé par l'Association de spina-bifida et d'hydrocéphalie du Québec, basé sur les meilleures pratiques qui ont été observées en clinique pour faciliter la transition vers les soins pour adultes. Ce site est compatible pour les ordinateurs, les tablettes et les téléphones intelligents.

Pensatout propose 4 parcours comportant chacun des missions. Les parcours sont indépendants les uns des autres, les jeunes peuvent tout faire ou simplement prendre ce dont ils ont besoin.

Pensatout, c'est une foule de ressources. Chaque parcours renferme des fichiers ressources dans lesquels les jeunes trouveront une foule d'informations.

Pensatout, c'est aussi la possibilité de se projeter dans l'avenir. Les deux parcours Bien-être et Planification sont une invitation à se donner les moyens de voir loin. Les jeunes auront l'occasion de développer des plans d'action pour atteindre leurs objectifs!

Pensatout, ce sont aussi des nouveautés. En effet, nous avons ajouté dernièrement une mission « alimentation », c'est un outil qui évolue.

Et Pensatout c'est encore bien plus : un bottin, l'occasion de planifier des conversations avec des personnes d'importance, des rappels par courriels… en français ou en anglais.

Pour en savoir davantage, visitez https://pensatout.ca/ ou https://notes2self.ca/.

Laurence Leser est directrice générale de l'Association de spina-bifida et d'hydrocéphalie du Québec.

10 ans au service des personnes en situation de handicap pour

L'ÉTAPE de Laval

Par *Amélie Tremblay*

Le 21 novembre dernier, l'organisme L'ÉTAPE célébrait les 10 ans d'existence de son bureau de Laval lors d'une soirée festive où la bonne humeur et l'humour étaient à l'honneur. Sachant que 1757 personnes en situation de handicap ont bénéficié des services d'intégration et de maintien en emploi de l'organisme sur le territoire de Laval durant les cinq dernières années, il y avait effectivement de quoi fêter.

Pour l'occasion, la direction, les employés et les clients de L'ÉTAPE ainsi que quelques élus se sont rassemblés lors d'un cocktail dînatoire. L'humoriste Angelo Schiraldi, lui-même en situation de handicap et ancien client de L'ÉTAPE, a présenté un numéro qui a, sans contredit, animé la soirée!

Avec ses bureaux à Montréal et à Laval, l'organisme L'ÉTAPE, subventionné par Emploi-Québec, répond aux besoins des personnes en situation de handicap qui habitent l'île de Montréal et l'île de Laval en offrant des services gratuits en matière d'employabilité. Toute personne ayant une déficience entraînant une incapacité significative et persistante et qui est sujette à rencontrer des obstacles dans l'accomplissement d'activités courantes peut y accéder. Les services de L'ÉTAPE sont offerts en français et en anglais, et pour les personnes sourdes ou malentendantes, l'organisme privilégie la langue des signes (LSQ/ASL) et la technique oraliste.

De gauche à droite : Jean-François Rivet (coordonnateur de L'ÉTAPE Laval), François Lamarre (trésorier de L'ÉTAPE), François Huard (directeur de L'ÉTAPE), Michel Nadeau, Michel Poissant (conseiller municipal de la Ville de Laval). (Photo, L'Étape)

Fort de plus de 40 ans d'existence à Montréal et maintenant 10 ans à Laval, L'ÉTAPE continue de développer des projets pour mener sa mission encore plus loin. En effet, en plus d'agrandir ses locaux lavallois, l'organisme a récemment mis sur pied une page Facebook, produit des portraits inspirants de quelques-uns de ses clients et participé à une formation dédiée aux employeurs à propos de l'embauche de personnes en situation de handicap. De plus, l'équipe s'est agrandie avec, notamment, un poste d'agente d'intégration dont le rôle est d'offrir un soutien directement en milieu de travail pour les personnes en situation de handicap qui en éprouvent le besoin. Cette nouveauté assure un accompagnement plus soutenu pour celles et ceux qui rencontrent de plus grands défis face à l'intégration en emploi.

C'est donc avec la tête remplie de projets que l'équipe de L'ÉTAPE continue, année après année, à élargir et à améliorer ses services afin d'accompagner le mieux possible sa clientèle.

Malgré la situation actuelle, L'ÉTAPE continue de travailler pour l'intégration et le maintien en emploi des personnes en situation de handicap de la région de Montréal et de Laval. Les rencontres aux bureaux ont récemment repris dans le respect de mesures de sécurité afin de protéger les clients et le personnel. Il est également possible d'avoir un rendez-vous téléphonique ou par visioconférence. Quelle que soit l'option choisie, il vous suffit de laisser un message au 514 526-0887 (Montréal) ou au 450 667-9999 (Laval) et nous vous retournerons votre appel en moins de 24 heures ouvrables.

Pour en savoir plus, suivez notre page facebook.com/LEtapeLavaletMontreal/ Pour toutes demandes d'informations, contactez letape@letape.org.

Amélie Tremblay est conseillère aux communications à L'Étape.

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70 ANS DÉJÀ Moi, j'y crois!

Par *Joseph Khoury*

Le stade olympique a été illuminé en vert pour marquer la Journée mondiale de la paralysie cérébrale le 6 octobre. (Photos, L'Association de paralysie cérébrale du Québec)

L'intégration d'une personne handicapée dans une société active ne peut être envisagée que si tout citoyen est conscient du rôle prépondérant qu'il doit jouer afin de permettre à son voisin handicapé de participer à une vie sociale et humaine aussi riche et étendue que la sienne.

La paralysie cérébrale n'est pas une maladie, mais bien un handicap lourd qui touche des êtres innocents et, plus particulièrement, des enfants dès la tendre enfance. Ces derniers en seront affligés toute leur vie et, par ricochet, leurs parents et aidants naturels aussi.

Fondée en 1949 à Montréal, l'APCQ œuvre à améliorer les conditions de vie et l'intégration sociale des personnes vivant avec la paralysie cérébrale. Nous cherchons par tous les moyens à défendre leur dignité et à promouvoir leurs droits dans toutes les sphères de l'activité humaine.

On estime à 22 000 le nombre de personnes atteintes au Québec. Si on tient compte de leurs familles et leurs proches, ce sont 100 000 personnes qui sont touchées directement ou indirectement par ce handicap. De plus, 140 nouveaux cas sont recensés chaque année au Québec, sans que la science puisse empêcher ou ralentir cette atteinte au cerveau. Seulement 10 % de ceux et celles qui vivent avec ce handicap pourront mener une vie presque normale.

Nous avons terminé récemment la création d'un réseau pancanadien de paralysie cérébrale regroupant toutes les provinces, et ce, à l'occasion de notre premier congrès en octobre 2019, dans le cadre de la journée mondiale de paralysie cérébrale à Saint-Jean-sur-Richelieu. Nous sommes fiers de travailler avec l'Université McGill et la Chaire de recherche en paralysie cérébrale de l'Université Laval, que nous avons cofondée il y a maintenant 28 ans.

Il est vrai que nos efforts déployés au cours des 20 dernières années étaient indispensables. D'une part, les membres du conseil et les administrateurs de nos bureaux ont fait un travail exceptionnel dans différents projets pour répondre aux besoins quotidiens de nos membres et, d'autre part, la transparence et la rigidité de nos finances nous ont permis de réaliser des projets majeurs. Notre fierté, c'est de n'avoir jamais fait l'objet d'une critique de la part des médias tout au long des 20 dernières années de notre mandat.

Aujourd'hui, à l'occasion de notre 70e anniversaire, nous pouvons affirmer que cette grande société que nous cherchons à bâtir au profit des personnes handicapées n'est plus une utopie, mais bien une réalité « Pour que le soleil se lève à l'horizon pour de meilleurs lendemains ».

Le papillon est le symbole de la paralysie cérébrale.

Pour en savoir davantage, visitez www.paralysiecerebrale.com.

Joseph Khoury est président de l'Association de paralysie cérébrale du Québec.

Edward Murphy School takes part in combined mindfulness language learning project

“Mindfulness is a wonderful way to help children manage their emotions, reduce their stress, improve their academics and even develop greater empathy,” says Randy Taran, CEO of Project Happiness. Using this philosophy, Edward Murphy Elementary School of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) in Hochelaga-Maisonneuve undertook a pilot project to pair mindfulness with stimulating language skills in the Junior Language Class. This effort was a collaboration between the classroom special education teacher Pamela D’Adamo and EMSB Student Service professionals Anna Kij, speech-language pathologist; Hailey Segal, occupational therapist; and Janet Silverstone Perlis, psychologist.

Language acquisition is about the implicit learning of words, grammar rules and sentence structures. This can be extremely challenging for students with language acquisition difficulties including those with Developmental Language Disorder (DLD). Students in the language class are able to receive targeted instruction by their teacher, who focuses on stimulating their language skills.

As the class is comprised of up to eight students, the goals and objectives for each student are individualized and their progress is closely monitored.

Mindfulness is well-known for its ability to help learners retain new information by reducing stress while being open to integrating new knowledge. Therefore, using a combination of mindfulness and language stimulation strategies can have a powerful effect.

Our project included eight sessions, which focused on enhancing language skills while applying mindfulness strategies. Using this two-pronged approach, students were provided with tools and strategies to self-regulate with the objective of minimizing intruding thoughts and feelings that could potentially interfere with their learning. As a result, students were readily able to integrate new vocabulary that was targeted in each of these sessions.

The theme of the first series of sessions was “Our Senses.” Each lesson focused on one of our five senses by introducing or expanding vocabulary and incorporating hands-on mindful activities. The content of each session was linked to the classroom curriculum and reinforced throughout the week by Ms. D’Adamo.

Due to the success of this project, a second block of sessions is being planned to take place later in the year.

Introducing mindfulness at home

Mindfulness can have great benefits at home. Taran offers some suggestions on how to implement it with your child. *For more information about mindfulness, read Danika Swanson’s article on p. 11 of this edition.*

1. ***Breathing***
   This is a great way to start. Sit on a chair or floor with your back straight but not tense. Close your eyes and use your other senses, like listening. For two to three minutes, breathe slowly in through your nose and out through your mouth. There are also free apps and websites available to help guide your practice, which can be great for beginners.

2. ***Create a “Mindfulness Corner”***
   Designate a special place in your home that you turn into a “zone of peace.” Make it cozy with pillows and blankets.

3. ***Schedule a regular time***
   Practice sessions improve skills. Having a designated mindfulness time helps make it a go-to habit. Before bed is a wonderful time, as the mindfulness practice relaxes everyone into a more peaceful state.

4. ***Apply mindfulness strategies during transitions***
   Getting out the door for school is stressful. Consider ways to de-stress, like waking up a little earlier for some quiet time or encouraging your children to help (as they can) to pack their lunches the night before. Dr. Christine Carter of Greater Good Science Center prepares for the morning rush by placing sticky notes on her fridge. They are reminders to notice emotions, name the emotion, accept what is going on, and breathe (pausing to take a few deep breaths) before jumping into action.

5. ***Make homework time distraction-free***
   Turn off all electronics.

6. ***Take movement breaks***

7. ***Be mindful with discipline***
   There’s no getting around it - discipline is part of parenting. It is helpful to see discipline as teaching, rather than confrontation. The first step is being mindful of what your child is feeling. In *No-Drama Discipline,* Dr. Dan Siegel and Dr. Tina Bryson suggest:

- Communicate comfort so your child feels safe to open up. Get down to your child’s eye level, and put your hand on his arm or hug to give him a sense of reassurance. You can also tell him, “It’s hard, isn’t it? Can you tell me about it?”
- Validate and say something like, “If I were in your shoes, at the same age, I might feel the same way.”
- Listen, rather than lecture. Breathe.
- Reflect. Say back what you hear like, “I understand that you’re upset because you don’t want to go to bed right now.”
- Redirect. After you understand what is happening internally to your child, you can determine what you want to teach and how best to do it. For example, you may want to say, “If you get your rest now you won’t feel tired at school tomorrow. Would you like to read one more book and then we can tuck you in so you can go to bed?”

Vocabulary boosting

The following tips will help boost your child’s vocabulary:

1. Read together and discuss what you have read.
2. Allocate a specific time to have “special conversation time.”
3. Help your child create a personal dictionary with new, relevant words.
4. Create a “word wall” as a reminder for new words.
5. Practice naming items during your everyday tasks with your child.
6. Play games at age-appropriate levels (e.g. Scrabble, Boggle, Headbands).
7. Use songs as a springboard for stimulating discussion of different words and meanings.
8. Introduce less used or more sophisticated words.
9. Model curiosity by pointing out things and asking questions.

For more information about vocabulary learning, visit https://www.readnaturally.com/research/5-components-of-reading/vocabulary

https://www.readingrockets.org/teaching/reading-basics/vocabulary

Randy Taran is the CEO and founder of Project Happiness, a global organization which specializes in emotional resilience-building programs that are used by people of any age and endorsed by public schools, private institutions and universities in the U.S. and 90 countries around the world. Taran is also co-author of the Project Happiness Handbook *and producer of the award-winning film Project Happiness (https://projecthappiness.org/).*

Pamela D’Adamo is a teacher, Anna Kij is a speech-language pathologist, Hailey Segal is an occupational therapist and Janet Silverstone Perlis is a psychologist at the English Montreal School Board.

By *Pam D’Adamo, Anna Kij, Hailey Segal and Janet Silverstone Perlis*

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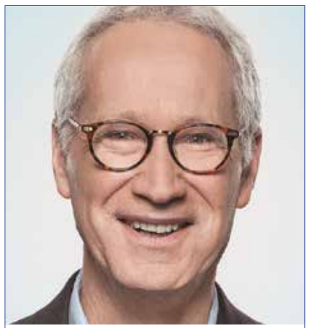

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Summer fun with a virtual twist!

By *Cindy Davis and Wendy Singer*

Planning ahead for summer might be a little tricky this year. Sleepaway camps are cancelled in Quebec, and though day camps are permitted to run, they are faced with many restrictions and some have chosen not to open. With many makeshift backyard camps and training programs popping up, some creative alternatives are taking shape to ensure a fun summer. To find out the status of your child's favourite camp or if they are offering a virtual camp, consult the camp section of our database of special needs resources on the *Inspirations* website, where you will find a comprehensive list of day and sleep-away camps, and respite care.

Locally, some Montreal outdoor pools, municipal playgrounds and outdoor sporting facilities have opened. The City of Montreal website (*www.montreal.ca*) is updated frequently with re-openings and gradual resumption of services by borough. The website also provides updates on city-wide services like community gardens, outdoor tennis courts, seasonal markets, parks and playgrounds, sport facilities, outdoor pools, dog parks, municipal golf courses and more.

As of June 1, Parks Canada began a gradual reopening of some outdoor areas at national parks, historic sites and marine conservation areas. Camping has resumed at some parks, however openings will differ across the country. Visit the Parks Canada website at *www.pc.gc.ca* for frequently updated information, and *www.sepaq.com* for information about the beautiful parks in Quebec.

The resources below are by no means a complete list, but just a sampling. Please check out the websites of your favourite organizations to see what they are offering this summer.

Supports for Canadians with disabilities address challenges stemming from COVID-19

On June 5, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced support to help Canadians with disabilities deal with extra expenses during the pandemic. This support includes a special one-time, tax-free payment to individuals who are certificate holders of the *Disability Tax Credit* as of June 1, 2020. The benefits are as follows: $600 for Canadians with a valid Disability Tax Credit certificate; $300 for Canadians with a valid Disability Tax Credit certificate and who are eligible for the Old Age Security (OAS) pension; $100 for Canadians with a valid Disability Tax Credit certificate and who are eligible for the OAS pension and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). This funding will benefit approximately 125 million Canadians with disabilities who have had additional expenses due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As of this writing the bill had not yet passed parliament. *Contact your MNA or MP for information or visit https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/economic-response-plan.html.*

Summit School's Padlet shares endless fun

Summit School's T.E.C.C. Program has put together an incredible Padlet (a Post-it board app) that contains videos, quizzes, word searches, easy art projects, homemade games, tips on exploring Montreal this summer, having fun with math, music, science, cooking challenges with greenhouse activities. Wow - what a variety!

On the **Summit Bistro-Fun Food Activities** you'll find the Rainbow Grilled Cheese, Pizza, and Ice Cream Sandwich Challenges, Willow's sprouting project, how to make your own Rice Krispies squares and more!

Bloom and Grow with Summit Flora offers all things fun and flowery, from "Be a rebel botanist" to "Making a flower rainbow."

We extend a special thank you to Chefs JJ Heffring and Willow Stewart, chef instructors at T.E.C.C. and Vicki Surplice, head florist at T.E.C.C. for preparing this special Padlet for us. *Please consult it and enjoy at https://summit-school.padlet.org/jj67/5hrdjr3fnk3zdqj0.*

The results of Willow's Ice Cream Sandwich Challenge. (Photo, Summit Bistro)

Y day camp at home

This year's version of the Sylvan Adam's YM-YWHA inclusive day camp combines Zoom and outdoor physical distanced programming when possible and within provincial guidelines. Each week will have its own theme, from superheroes to safari and talent week, with guest appearances. Recognizing that the pandemic has been stressful for kids, the Y has added a roving Applied Behavioural Analysis (ABA) specialist to their staff roster, which also includes some therapists, such as drama and music. They offer a quiet space for anyone who would like to have some quiet time. Campers will be split into bunks, each with their own Zoom account where they will enjoy a typical day at camp, but with shorter hours to encourage other activities. *To learn more about the Y's day camp, their Leadership Camp for adults with special needs and other family activities, like Y Family Art, Family Fun Fitness, visit https://www.ymywha.com/y-day-camp-at-home/ or email mrich@ymywha.com.*

Video production camps with Spectrum Productions

Since 2010, Spectrum Productions has been running a social enterprise model production company that teaches people with autism all aspects of film and media production. They uniquely employ individuals with autism. This year's distance creation Summer Video Production Camp is open to campers up to the age of 16. It will mirror the structure of their traditional camp, with adjustments for a virtual format and according to each campers' available technology and capacity. *For information, visit productionsspectrum.com.*

Shira Choir raises spirits with song

Even a pandemic has not stopped Cantor Daniel Benlolo and The Montreal Shira Choir from singing. The choir, co-founded by Benlolo and his wife Muriel Suissa, is made up of over 30 adults with special needs who all have a passion for music. Usually, the group meets in person and has a full repertoire of live performances throughout the year, but during this difficult time, Benlolo has kept choir members connected through weekly Zoom rehearsals. He begins each Zoom session by asking everyone about their feelings, following which, they sing together for approximately an hour. To Benlolo's delight, every single member of the choir has chosen to partake in the Zoom sessions, and he says the feedback has been amazing.

A select group of singers from the choir, along with Benlolo, performed in June during a virtual fundraiser for Mindstrong, a community-led, annual fundraiser benefitting mental health services and programs at the Jewish General Hospital. Benlolo is also in talks with Federation CJA to have The Montreal Shira Choir perform for seniors outdoors in front of local residences and facilities. *If you or someone you know is interested in joining The Montreal Shira Choir, email Muriel.Suissa@hotmail.com.*

Zoom-Zoo's lizards and pythons slither online and in backyards

Reptizoo gives children and adults the opportunity to interact with creatures they would otherwise only be able to see in a zoo. With their new Zoom-Zoo, children can meet frogs, tarantulas, vinagaroons, snakes, turtles and tortoises and the occasional rabbit, hedgehog, chinchilla and exotic bird online in the comfort of their own home, or with live backyard visits. While reptiles do not have facial expressions, they will surely change yours as you witness something fascinating and magical! *For information, to book Reptizoo online, at camp or in your backyard, or to sign your child up for Zoom-Zoo, visit http://reptizoo.com/ email info@reptizoo.com or call 450-452-4966.*

Grade 1 students Jamil Ndiaye, Zoya Alam and Alexis Dimos befriend a Reptizoo python at Sinclair Laird Elementary School. (Photo, Reptizoo)

TacTics connects families and kids online

While this summer may look different, Linda Aber is going to make sure that it's still a blast! The TacTics Resource Services Virtual Family Circle and Social Skills Camp was created to fill the quarantine summer void and use it as a constructive time for children to have fun while gaining social skill competency. Aber's programming is based on the Theraplay® and Social Thinking® curriculums. Children who participate in the Social Skills Camp are invited to join the free weekly Kidz Connect Activity Group, where they can interact with new friends and play games, tell jokes and more.

This is an opportunity for multiple families to come together and learn new concepts, tools and skills through fun and play.

Summer fun continued on p. 31

Summer fun continued from p. 30

Look out for guest speaker presentations at www.lindaaber.com. For information or to register, call 514-487-3533.

Autism House offers weekly support groups

Autism House has been operating as a non-profit organization since it was co-founded by Rosemary Maratta, occupational therapist, and her team in June 2019, with a mission to encourage autonomy and improve the quality of life of adults and adolescents with autism. Located in St. Henri by the Lachine Canal, Autism House has been offering weekly support groups, individual and group occupational therapy (OT) services, autonomy group classes and workshops for both autistic adults, and adolescents and their parents. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they have moved these services online and are reaping the benefits of continuing to meet. *For information, visit www.theautismhouse.ca or their Facebook page.*

Dylan Hervé, project coordinator, and Eric Caissie, an adult with autism who is the treasurer (Photo, Autism House)

ASC Connect shares resources

Autism Speaks Canada (ASC) is working hard with community and corporate partners to respond to the COVID-19 situation by providing relevant resources and relief programs with corporate allies. They have created two COVID-19 virtual communities on ASC Connect designed for youth, caregivers and adults. This national, bilingual, virtual platform aims to engage the autism community to navigate, learn and share resources, services, tools and network with the public and professionals. *Visit www.connect.autismspeaks.ca/home for more information.*

The Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) offers virtual programming

Committed to combatting the negative effects that isolation can have on Canadians with sight loss and in response to COVID-19, the CNIB Foundation is offering an impressive schedule of free virtual programs for this summer. It includes career support, yoga, tech training, book clubs, youth groups, family trivia, virtual bingo and more. *For information, visit cnib.ca.*

Langmobile shares music and mindfulness

Langmobile's learning centres are located in Montreal, St. Lambert and St. Bruno. This summer, they are offering free music and mindfulness online workshops that are designed to support families and children and youth with special needs aged 5 to 22. The workshops are animated by Aubreylyn Zazyczny, a recent graduate of McGill University's Bachelor of Music/ Bachelor of Education program with experience teaching diverse populations, including her last field experience at John Grant High School. Classes will continue through the summer. *For information, visit www.langmobile.com.*

RT21 is on the GO!

Regroupement pour la Trisomie 21 has a fun-filled summer planned with a full schedule of online activities. Get moving with their Zumba workouts or join their Movement and Well-Being get-togethers for 18 and over, which focus on relaxation, managing stress, diet and more. Interactive activities include quiz and game sessions, reading club, film club and karaoke groups. RT21 also offers personalized support and specialized services at all times. *For information, visit trisomie.qc.ca.*

RT21's 13th annual "Three, 2, 1, GO!" fundraising and awareness race will take place virtually this year. You can compete in a 1, 2.5, 5 or 10 kilometre race wherever you are and in whatever way you'd like, be it a walk, run, bike or kayak! You'll have from August 21 to 23 to achieve your goal. Registration is $15 and all proceeds go directly to RT21. *For information, http://trisomie.qc.ca/*

RT21 member Frederique participating in online activities. (Photo, Edward Dillon)

Activities galore to do at home

Jooay lists accessible activities on their app. They are now featuring online activities. If you have already downloaded the Jooay app, then simply search for activities to do from home by typing "online" in the search box. If you don't have the app yet, visit jooay.com or download directly from the App store or Google Play.

Are you looking for a creative way to connect with loved ones and friends that you can't see right now? ***Mypostcard.com*** offers a great way to let the people you love and miss know you are thinking about them. Send a photo and some text, and they'll prepare and mail it for you!

Virtual trips can lead you to fascinating and exotic places. While we can't travel far from home this summer, this could be a great way to have an at-home adventure. Check out:

***Google Earth** at *earth.google.com.*
***Wildearth Live Safaris** YouTube channel at *https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCV6HJBZD_hZcIX9JVJ3dCXQ/videos*
***Ripley's Aquarium** of Canada's live aquarium camera at *https://www.ripleyaquariums.com/canada/live-cameras/*

Apple Education shares a ton of fun, creative activities for children, like how to make a homemade colouring book with your own photos. Take a few fun photos, convert them to black and white and voila, you have your own colouring sheets. Use Markup to add colour. *Follow Apple Education on Twitter for more activities.*

If you'd like to learn about the world of art, visit **Google arts and culture** online exhibits:*https://artsandculture.google.com/*

A birdwatching adventure with Captain Catalyst

By ***Steve Rosenstein***

Appreciating our local songbirds can start in your backyard, but first you have to spend the time looking for them. It's a team effort; the adults with the children.

My own adventure started with a trip to my local park, where I had a close encounter with a small ruby-crowned kinglet. The male likes to flash a red tuft of feathers on its head to show off. And it got as close as two feet from me. It cheered up my day. But things were only to get better! I discovered a "warbler tree," in this case, an ash tree, where migratory birds visited to have a snack and take a break from their long migration from the tropics to the forests of the Laurentians. One morning, I saw 13 species of warblers on this one tree. In order to identify them, I had to catch a glimpse of colour or hear their brief birdsong.

However, you do not have to leave your house or apartment to observe birds. You can become a "couch-potato" birdwatcher by simply looking out your window. Birds that I saw included the chimney swift, or "flying cigar" bird, performing its aerial acrobatics; a low-flying great blue heron; turkey vultures soaring high above; fast-moving merlin (a type of falcon); Canada geese in formation; and mallard ducks in search of a pond (the males have beautiful green heads).

You can birdwatch while sitting under a tree or on a tree stump in a local park. Or at one of our six wonderful nature parks on the island of Montreal, not to mention the hundreds of regular parks. You will just need a little bit of patience! Please check in advance to be sure the parks are open before you go.

The significant downturn in human activity has spurred the return of many different types of birds, and in greater numbers than usual. So far this spring, I have counted over 50 species, and just in my area alone.

Then there are the birds which stay all year round. They are the birds that children can watch with delight – some eating out of birdfeeders, such as chickadees, cardinals, goldfinches, blue jays and nuthatches, etc. Some chickadees are so friendly that they will pick seeds, such as sunflower seeds, right out of your child's hand.

This is but a little glimpse, the tip of the iceberg, into what you can do with your children that is educational, close to nature, good for the spirit, and a bonding opportunity for both parent and child.

You can find Steve Rosenstein teaching his craft in various schools, libraries and museums, such as the Redpath Museum. To reach him, call 514-733-2048.

(Photo, Unsplash)

Arts & Entertainment

When We Walk filmmaker reflects on navigating life with multiple sclerosis

By ***Randy Pinsky***

“This movie is about you and me,” are the opening lines of the 2019 documentary *When We Walk.* A narrated letter from a father to his son, the film is a moving first-hand account of Jason DaSilva’s battle with multiple sclerosis (MS). From dealing with unpredictable physical challenges, to his caregiver wife’s burnout, DaSilva reflects honestly about this part of his life through the camera lens. Screened by Cinema Politica Concordia on April 6, *When We Walk* was followed by a question-and-answer session with the filmmaker as well as disability activists Aimee Louw and Gift Tshuma of Accesibilize Montreal.

“Making this film was a form of therapy for me,” confided DaSilva. “I was able to use the medium as a way to confront what I was going through.” A prolific filmmaker of short films and documentaries, *When We Walk* was 2019’s Best Canadian Feature and Hot Docs winner and the sequel to DaSilva’s 2015 Emmy Award-winning *When I Walk* depicting his diagnosis with MS. In his Emmy acceptance speech, DaSilva dedicated the film “to all people with disabilities” and vowed to continue to give them a voice.

The son of a filmmaker, there is a common theme in the film where DaSilva teaches his son the finer points of a camera as his father did for him, but at a distance as he progressively loses mobility. DaSilva confided to his son, “the day you were born was the best day of our lives.” An active and engaged father, he wistfully commented, “but there were so many places I couldn’t take you.”

For those with social mobility challenges, it is simply not possible to be spur of the moment as locations have to be carefully assessed beforehand. In light of this reality, DaSilva and his wife Alice Cook launched AXS Map, a crowdsourcing platform to rank the accessibility of businesses. As noted on their website: “for many, inaccessibility is an endless source of frustration... AXS Map aims to ease the burden of social exclusion by providing people with disabilities the freedom to be spontaneous.”

As DaSilva’s needs increased, greater strain was placed on his marriage as Cook struggled to care for her husband, son and manage her own career. In one scene, he asked her, “Do you ever wish you were with someone able-bodied?” to which she replied, “Yes, but I wish it were you.”

With his marriage crumbling, DaSilva sought external advice to come to terms with the situation. His disabled colleague reflected, “I don’t blame [partners] for wanting to leave,” continuing ruefully, “if I could run away from myself, I would.” In reflecting upon his own relationship, he commented, “I feel that if I were not disabled, things could have worked.”

Jason DaSilva and his son.
(Photo, Jason DaSilva)

When We Walk explores a heartfelt, no-holds-barred account of a father struggling to cope with his condition and be close to his son. A forthcoming film in the trilogy called *When They Walk* will cover community initiatives for accessibility.

To learn more about AXS Map, visit https://www.wheniwalk.com/axs-map. Find out more about When We Walk *at http://wewalk.com.*

Tshuma, Louw launch CripTalk Corner

After participating in the panel discussion for the film *When We Walk,* Gift Tshuma and Aimee Louw were inspired to launch CripTalk Corner. This is an informal online gathering for exploring issues of accessibility where the duo reflect on their own experiences and invite comments from the audience.

“Crip” is an inclusive term, which has been powerfully reclaimed by the special needs community. Directly challenging its historically problematic use (“cripple”), it “represents the contemporary disability rights wave and is an ‘insider’ term for disability culture” (“Breaking Silences, Demanding Crip Justice” Conference, Sept 22-24, 2019, Wright State University).

The first moderated discussion on May 4 centered around experiences in the current pandemic. “It’s a challenge to not spiral down into my dark cave of negative thoughts,” said Tshuma, adding that the emotional support of friends has helped him to manage. Participating from Vancouver, Louw commented: “I’ve become an adventurous wheelchair driver because I need to get my thrills somehow!”

Enthusiastic audience participation demonstrated that this is a conversation with a following. With luck, CripTalk Corner will become an online series of support and networking, “because we need each other,” noted Louw, “now more than ever.”

— Randy Pinsky

ReelAbilities Film Festival goes online

By ***Cindy Davis***

The ReelAbilities Film Festival showcasing Canadian and international shorts, features and documentaries about Deaf and disability communities moved online this year due to COVID-19. The festival, now in its fifth year in Canada (it originated in the US in 2007), was held from May 20 to 24. Filmmakers and actors with disabilities or who are Deaf were behind the productions.

The festival featured a dozen feature films, several short films as well as events, workshops and panel discussions throughout the five days. It opened with a screening of the documentary *Code of the Freaks*, a fascinating look at the way disabled characters have been portrayed in Hollywood films throughout the years, using hundreds of clips from over a century of Hollywood favourites and analysed by disability activists, artists and scholars.

In 1932, a controversial film called *Freaks* was released and portrayed the lives and relationships of the members of a carnival sideshow. This film serves as a jumping off point in the documentary, for the many Hollywood movies succeeding it featuring disabled characters. Clips from films including *Rain Man*, *The Green Mile*, *Million Dollar Baby*, and *To Kill a Mockingbird*, are used in *Code* to demonstrate that several key underlying stereotypes about disabled people have been perpetuated in film – and continue to be to this day. The analysis is further broken down by race, gender and type of disability. The conclusion by the analysts interviewed is that these depictions further dangerous stereotypes and that more diverse stories about and by disabled individuals must be told.

The film was followed by a Q&A period with *Code of the Freaks* director Salome Chasnoff; academic, advocate and public speaker Carrie Sandahl; and moderated by Dr. Angelo Murreda, who all agree that more diversity in the storytelling is necessary to break harmful labels and imagery of the disabled in pop culture.

A still shot from the documentary Code of the Freaks, which was shown at the ReelAbilities Film Festival.
(Photo, ReelAbilies)

The Festival’s closing event was a screening of *From My Side of the Spectrum*, a short documentary by 16-year-old Aiden Lee, followed by a lively youth panel discussion with Lee and members of the Holland-Bloorview Youth Council. Lee’s film was the winner of the Inaugural Sandra Carpenter ReelAbilities Toronto Film Festival Student Film Award. The film beautifully captures how Lee, who has autism, uses art to express himself and is able to convey the beauty of our differences through his work. Lee also goes into schools and mentors young children to embrace what makes them unique and to follow their passion. “Being weird, special and different – that’s what makes you you, and that’s what makes me me,” he says in the film.

Despite having to go online this year, the Festival organizers did a great job of providing a variety of engaging films and events for participants.

Arts & Entertainment

BOOK REVIEW

Burnout to Unstoppable:

An Autism Mom's Memoir about Prioritizing Self-care, Becoming Stress Resilient and Unleashing Her Inner Badass

by Claudia Taboada, Health and Wellness Press, 2020

By *Elaine Cohen*

When Claudia Taboada's son, Nico, now 18, was diagnosed with autism close to 16 years ago, a psychologist pointed out, "Parenting a child with special needs is not a sprint, it's a marathon." That was long before she had become a runner. Now after successfully completing 23 marathons, Taboada can vouch for the validity of the statement. Special needs moms must prioritize self-care and pace themselves to prevent burnout, she advocates.

Taboada is a disability rights advocate. She is on the board of Giant Steps School and is involved in other organizations. She aims to raise awareness of the dire need for funding, so children with special needs can reach their potential in self-sufficiency and productivity. She is also on a mission to help caregivers ask for more funding for respite services so that they can have a break and seek self-fulfillment in all areas of their lives.

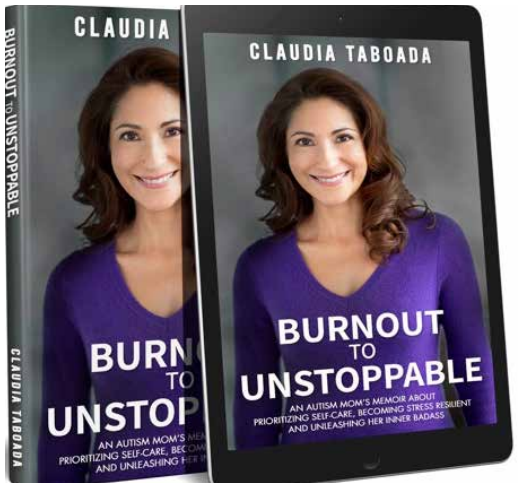
In a recent interview, Taboada said people may not understand why parental caregivers are unable to assume positions outside the home. "We must be available to tend to behaviour and health issues," she explained. "As a lawyer, it would be impossible to just pick up and leave work, so I had to reinvent myself as an author/advocate working from home."

The author has another book on the way. It is geared to self-care for moms. "With all I've learned, I no longer feel overwhelmed. I know I can help other moms. Eleven years ago, I was not this person. I had no self-confidence, and I had been neglecting both my physical and mental health. I have now an arsenal of self-care and stress resilience tools that I use on a daily basis to help me parent my severely autistic son with grace. I have also learned to live for the moment, not dwell on the past or the future."

The book is divided into four parts: 'How I lost myself in the autism whirlwind;' 'The physical, mental and emotional effects of caring for a child with a long-term condition;' 'Reclaiming my identity and prioritizing self-care;' 'Running, racing and becoming an unstoppable badass.' A workbook on prioritizing self-care is available for autism moms/caregivers. An introduction precedes the memoir, and each section includes many chapters. Health professionals, educators and parents will appreciate Taboada's notes and bibliography.

It's ironic that taking out Sicas, the service dog, for a walk started off as a task Taboada resented but gradually their walks turned into runs. Although Sicas lost interest, Taboada's pace gained momentum and served as the tool to turn her life around. Readers can look forward to her revelation in Chapter 21.

The author was 15 when she immigrated to Edmonton from El Salvador. The trilingual achiever adapted well and subsequently earned a law degree from the University of Ottawa. She married an engineer, and they became affiliated with firms in Montreal. Her former husband had to travel often for business, and Taboada became the primary, hands-on caregiver.



Taboada takes pride in both her boys' progress. Nico has a brother, Alex, who is 16. They both enjoy music. Nico plays the piano, and Alex is in a school music program. "Alex is a responsible young man and loves his brother unconditionally."

Visit www.amazon.ca to purchase an eBook or paperback copy. If you want to know more about Taboada's upcoming books, online courses and life coaching services you can go to her website www.claudiataboada.com

NETFLIX REVIEW

By *Ishini Fernando*

Raising Dion, a 2019 family-friendly sci-fi Netflix show created by Carol Barbee and Dennis Liu, follows the eventful lives of widowed mother Nicole (Alisha Wainwright) and her seven-year-old son Dion (Ja'Siah Young). After the death of her husband Mark (Michael B. Jordan), Nicole and Dion move to a new neighbourhood for a fresh start. However, viewers will learn in the very first episode that things aren't going so well for the mother and son duo. Nicole gets fired from her job and Dion struggles to make friends at his new school despite his many attempts to make a good impression.

Chaos quickly ensues after Dion manifests inexplicable superhuman powers he is unable to control. With the help of her late husband's best friend who is also Dion's godfather Pat (Jason Ritter), a frantic Nicole begins her search for answers, desperate to protect her son from potential enemies who might want to exploit him, all the while keeping him from accidentally hurting himself and others. As secrets emerge and unravel, they soon discover that there is a lot more to Mark's death than they'd originally known.

The first season of *Raising Dion* counts nine episodes packed with intrigue and plot twists that keep viewers at the edge of their seats from start to finish. Apart from delivering a great storyline focused on the development of interesting characters and their relationships with one another, the series showcases delightful acting from the cast. One character who stands out in particular is Esperanza, Dion's wise and artistically gifted wheelchair-bound classmate who claims she is his best friend despite Dion's initial lack of enthusiasm about the friendship.

Sammi Haney, the child actress who portrays Esperanza, is also wheelchair-bound and has the most serious form of brittle bone disease that is survivable, just like her character. Sammi hopes the show will help people see past her wheelchair to who she truly is as a person, eliminating the stigma surrounding people with disabilities in television. Through her portrayal of Esperanza, Sammi brings cheerfulness and unwavering confidence to her character as she fondly looks after Dion throughout the series.

Raising Dion also explores important topics such as accessibility, respecting boundaries, racial bias and accountability, among others. Fans of the show will be pleased to know that the cast will be back with a second season on Netflix.

Arts & Entertainment

From stage to screen: The making of *The Power of One*

By ***Steven Atme***

Watching movies is one of the best ways to relax and get some much-needed downtime. To actually make a movie, well, that's something else! As a kid, I made movies for fun with friends and family. I would say to my father, repeatedly: "I would like to meet Steven Spielberg one day."

While thinking back after a major success with my 2017 variety show, "Special People Have Dreams 5th Anniversary Celebration," came this question: "What will happen next?" An idea came to mind. Musical works and live shows are one thing – but a movie lives on.

After reliving many flashbacks of the whole process of the variety show, I decided to make a movie titled *The Power of One.* The first day of production was January 8, 2019, with my four friends: Fareed Gul, Samuel Lewis, Gabriel Fadda and Melissa Nower, who I have known since my school days at Summit School. As friends, we have encouraged each other through the creative arts to showcase our work as people living with autism and Asperger syndrome.

We met weekly at Summit School to discuss ideas for original skits/adaptations before writing them down, and then we rehearsed. Afterwards, a search began for cinematographers, backup actors and singers. We were fortunate that, through mutual connections, we met people with and without disabilities that could work with us in these areas.

During filming sessions, our team travelled across the island of Montreal to shoot our skits. The production was completed on November 23, 2019. Throughout December until right before the holidays, I edited the whole movie. It contains eight skits created by five close friends and 19 supporting people. We all had a wonderful time and did it together with pride, laughter, joy and tears. With this quote that I treasure since childhood, "The sky is the limit," we also encouraged others working on the project to have a say in the process and share anything: ideas, feelings, and to be themselves and have fun. We didn't care about who's position was more crucial, who joined sooner or later, or who gave big or small contributions. Everyone played a big role beautifully as leaders, artists and inspirations. That goes to show we happen to live in the diverse, inclusive world that *The Power of One* portrays.

The Power of One is entertaining while delivering a powerful message for society to realize we all face struggles in everyday life, being left out and not even given chances to pursue one's goals. No limitations! It also shares the major concept of willingness to take on initiatives without thinking about general differences. Open those doors but more importantly, your heart and arms.

Stay tuned for screening dates when we are able to be together again, and see what we mean. *The Power of One* will lift your spirits high into the sky.

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.

Jordan River Anderson, the Messenger:

Documentary sheds light on difficulties faced by Aboriginal children with special needs

By ***Randy Pinsky***

Accessing resources and therapy for a child with special needs can be challenging under the best of circumstances but add having Aboriginal status and it becomes much more complex.

The documentary *Jordan River Anderson, the Messenger* was screened at Cinéma du Parc on January 21 to a packed theatre. Created by renowned Abenaki director and Order of Canada recipient Alanis Obomsawin, the screening was co-sponsored by Indigenous Access McGill and the McGill School of Social Work Reconciliation Fund.

The film documents the hurdles faced by Jordan River Anderson's family of Manitoba's Norway House Cree Nation in accessing critically needed medical services.

Jordan's mother experienced complications during pregnancy and had to be transported to the Children's Hospital of Winnipeg. Jordan was born with a very rare genetic muscle disorder known as Carey-Fineman-Ziter syndrome. Growing up on a ventilator and with little mobility, the little boy connected well with music therapy, to the delight of his dedicated caregivers.

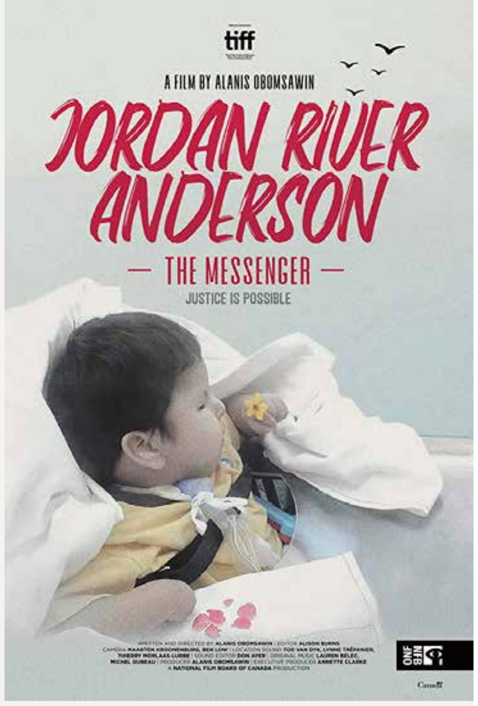
Jordan and his family required extensive specialized assistance for his condition. However, progress came to a stalemate when the federal and provincial governments continuously debated which jurisdiction was responsible for providing his services. Jordan never got the opportunity to go home to his loving family and community. He passed away while in a coma at five years old.

And so ensued an almost two-decade-long battle for change for other Aboriginal children with special needs. Progress in drafting and passing motions were often agonizingly slow. "There have still not been real, meaningful changes for the Aboriginal children who need the help [in their own communities like other Canadian children]," said Chief Ron Evans, former Chief of Norway House Cree Nation and former Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs.

Jordan's Principle was created to challenge the federal government's underfunding of Aboriginal families and ensure that they have equitable access to public products, services and support. As noted by Cindy Blackstock, executive director of the First Nations Child and Family Caring Society of Canada, the fight is so that "no First Nations child will be denied what all other Canadian kids have access to. They should not have to wait in line because of who they are."

Jordan's legacy has helped pave the way for other Aboriginal children to get the assistance they require. At events and council meetings, Jordan's baby blanket and a teddy bear with moccasins poignantly represent the tragedy experienced by his family. As Blackstock put it, "It's been years, and the government still calls for patience. The word patience is bound up in this blanket."

Spirit Bear and Children Make History by Cindy Blackstock and Eddy Robinson is a powerfully written book that commemorates Jordan's legacy. As the Human Rights Tribunal called for the government of Canada to fully implement Jordan's Principle by May 10, 2016, those involved consider that as the 'Bear Witness' date of the struggle.



Introducing the QCSI Network:

A new resource for specialized adult education practitioners

By *Jennifer Campbell and Matthew Kennedy*

Adult education practitioners in the area of Social Integration Services (SIS) are a unique breed of educators who operate within a unique teaching context. Although these teachers are responsible for delivering a single program of study established by the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur (MEES), their students are incredibly neurodiverse, with diagnoses ranging from autism to intellectual disabilities, learning disabilities, physical disabilities and mental health issues. This student population is also reflective of the province's cultural and linguistic diversity, and teachers and support staff provide programming to learners from all socio-economic backgrounds. As a result of this diversity, curriculum implementation can vary greatly from one SIS program to another.

Special Education teachers and educators are well versed in modifying and adapting curriculum and have a wealth of experience in differentiation; however, the day-to-day hurdles of meeting the needs of such a diverse group can be overwhelming, and SIS teachers – particularly those at smaller centres – may feel isolated in this highly specialized field of education.

In 2019, a group of teachers and consultants came together to begin to bridge gaps in the anglophone adult education sector through the creation of a website which now provides SIS educators with a breakdown of the curriculum, valuable teaching tools and resources. Most importantly, it is an online community of practice which connects teachers across the province. The co-founders of the Quebec Social Integration Network (QCSI Network), which include Avi Spector and Tracy Rosen from Réseau Éducation Collaboration Innovation Technologie (RÉCIT); Kim Grenier (Riverside School Board); Matthew Kennedy and Julian Verboomen (Lester B. Pearson School Board); and Katie Cashion, Michael Werenchuk and Christine Dussault (New Frontiers School Board) saw an opportunity to collaborate on lessons, units and teaching materials as well as to share best practices, professional development resources, behaviour management strategies and motivation techniques.

The network is always growing, and the newest members include Emilie Bowles from the RÉCIT, Jennifer Campbell from the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), and Marina Di Pratola from Riverside.

This type of professional development network can have a tremendous impact on teacher buy-in and student success, and the team is very grateful for funding from RÉCIT, which has made this collaborative project possible. As Spector explains: "The goal of the RÉCIT National Service project is to build networking opportunities and create digital resources that are appropriate for our Quebec adult education learners."

In the spirit of sustained collaboration, the network meets once a month at a different adult education centre, which allows the team to visit each member's SIS program. The goal is not to standardize materials and approaches; rather, it is to promote the best of every program by sharing ideas, experiences and strategies to support SIS staff and their students. The group provides SIS educators with the opportunity to participate in a collaborative learning environment, with a focus on technology and innovation, creative problem-solving, as well as personal and professional growth – all in the interest of ensuring that, collectively, we provide our wonderful adult learners with access to the high quality education that they deserve.

Over the past few months, the QCSI Network has been hard at work on developing and sharing resources during the COVID-19 health crisis.

For information, visit bit.ly/quebecsi Check out the network website for new activities and resources, and see what's been developed by LBP Cont. Ed. here: bit.ly/endeavouronline and at the EMSB here: http://emsb-aevs.com/AST/

Jennifer Campbell is the educational consultant for special education in the Adult Education and Vocational Services department of the EMSB. Matthew Kennedy is a consultant for Inclusive Adult Education and Social Integration at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

Camp Massawippi upgrades and adapts facilities over summer and offers virtual experience

By *Elaine Cohen*

Camper Noémie Gagné enjoys her time at Camp Massawippi. (Photo, Camp Massawippi)

Camp Massawippi, located on Lake Massawippi in Ayer's Cliff, is in the heart of Quebec's Eastern Townships. Founded in 1951, their mission is geared to perpetuate fun and friendships in a safe, secure, bilingual environment for children and adults with physical impairments - motor, visual, hearing.

A dynamic dedicated team is in place to embrace and respond to campers' needs, enabling them to surmount challenges and gain self-confidence with every success.

While registration numbers were up this year, respecting the Santé Publique's strict guidelines regarding COVID-19 make it impossible for both the Ayer's Cliff and Montreal Camp Massawippi sites to ensure the health and safety of vulnerable campers. Therefore, they had to pause their 2020 camp season.

As Jed Richman, interim executive director explained, "It's time to think positively and make lemonade from lemons during this unfortunate but necessary pause in camp operations. We are excited to share some of the great things going on at Camp Massawippi. We will be maintaining and nurturing the link between campers, their camp and staff, by offering a virtual camp with a variety of adapted online activities including dance, music, cooking, special guests, meditation and yoga, to name just a few," he said. "These activities will provide our campers with a window outside of confinement; a chance to interact with their counsellors and campmates."

The animation team will journal and share the progress from camp this summer as they embark on much needed upgrades and changes to make the facility even safer and more equipped. "We will be repairing, renovating, rebuilding and revitalizing this amazing camp," said Richman.

At the heart of Camp Massawippi's communal setting is the dining hall and kitchen, which dates back many decades. "While retaining its rustic charm and history, we are rebuilding our dining room to be a modular, modern and multipurpose facility including elements such as an adapted kitchen for teaching life skills and encouraging and promoting inclusion and self-efficacy. In addition, we will continue to nourish the souls of our campers with the food that Camp Massawippi has become renowned for," shared Richman.

The Camp Massawippi team look forward to reopening next year so campers can have fun, feel and breathe the fresh air and enjoy the freedom that the programs and community provide.

A Capital Campaign has begun to fund the much needed renovations at the camp and their dining room and kitchen. If you would like to help out or learn more about the camp, contact Theodora Brinckman, executive director of Habilitas and Camp Massawippi Board member at theodora.brinckman@habilitas.ca or 514-882-7550.

Sports

Special Olympics Québec keeps athletes in shape during pandemic

By *Cindy Davis*

When COVID-19 reared its ugly head in early March, the directors at Special Olympics Québec (SOQ) knew that they had to act quickly in order to make sure their athletes and followers stayed connected and were able to continue their training from home. Usually, the organization has approximately 8,000 athletes training with volunteer coaches in local training centres across the province. With over 1,200 volunteers, summer and winter games to plan, and competitions held throughout the year, they knew that the quarantine would dramatically impact their participants.

As of March 12, SOQ ceased all on-site training, cancelled competitions and quickly began providing virtual videos, classes and challenges on their social media platforms. Their "SOQ Challenge," which launched on March 23, includes live activities on Facebook as well as daily emails. They encourage followers to film themselves doing fun weekly challenges to then share and cheer each other on. With different themes every day, the goal is to keep participants engaged with a holistic approach. Their "Active Start at Home" program, for two- to seven-year-olds, encourages the development of motor skills and movement. "FUNdamentals at Home," for eight- to 12-year-olds, aims to develop basic sport skills.

Francine Gendron, executive director of SOQ, says that the online classes and challenges are as important for the emotional health of participants as they are for their physical well-being. "For many of them, Special Olympics is their social network – this is where they have their friends and where they go if they're not in school. It's kind of a little family," says Gendron. "[The classes] are really to make sure they will not be isolated and depressed during this period. Also, we want them to stay healthy. So, we know that with the weekly training [online], first it's about seeing their friends, but it's also to train and make sure they move a little bit. We want them to keep up the habit of moving and being healthy."

The SOQ online program has been so successful that the Quebec Ministry of Education has included the link to the SOQ's YouTube Channel on their "Open School" resource page for families with special needs. One of the SOQ's corporate sponsors, Wolseley, has been using the online challenges with their contacts as well. Gendron has been very pleased with the reach of their virtual offerings, and has noticed many new faces participating. Despite their efforts, Gendron estimates that between five to 10 percent of their athletes do not have access to the internet at home, and they are working hard to reach out to those individuals regularly by phone and by mailing printouts of their exercises.

"We miss everyone, but we're happy to meet them online as well," she says. "To see that they are exercising, they are happy, they are doing their best, it's extremely rewarding for our people and our employees. It's an interesting human experience for us as well."

Jessica Levitt working out at home with Special Olympics Québec during the pandemic. (Photo, Monique Levitt)

Visit the SOQ Facebook page for updates at facebook.com/olympiquesspeciauxquebec or their YouTube channel at https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCNuF7d2qEYeH418EYU6PpRg

'Living Without Limitations'; Noam Gershony, Israeli Paralympics tennis champion

By *Randy Pinsky*

"You can't imagine what it's like to lose the ability to walk," shared Noam Gershony, Israeli Paralympics tennis champion, at McGill University on February 4 as part of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAIM). The event was co-organized by the Jewish National Fund, Hillel Montreal and Federation CJA in partnership with Masa Israel Journey and Canadian Magen David Adom. The packed room attentively listened as Gershony related his story of courage and resilience after a horrifying helicopter accident.

Kylie Huberman, Anna Kost, Naomi Mazer, Lauren Goodman, Noam Gershony, Sam Moyal, Haley Brett and Jon Levine at the Living Without Limitations event at McGill University.

Gershony was serving as an Apache helicopter pilot as part of the Israeli Defense Forces during the Second Lebanon War in July 2006 when his team was summoned to the northern border late one night. The helicopter somehow lost its night vision capabilities, and, compounded by tail and rotor problems, collided with another Apache. While the other helicopter was able to make an emergency crash landing, Gershony's partner was killed instantly, and he himself was severely injured.

Israel's first responders, Magen David Adom, flew into the danger zone and "risked their lives to save mine," noted Gershony. He was unconscious for a week and woke up in Haifa's Rambam hospital with no recollection of that night.

The crash resulted in broken arms, legs and back, and he required a tractotomy to assist with breathing. Gershony wryly joked, "The first solid food I was able to eat was Bamba [traditional Israeli peanut butter-flavoured snacks] and they never tasted so good!"

It took months of physiotherapy for him to re-learn how to sit, and eventually, to stand.

The Paralympian emotionally shared how difficult it was to accept the extent of his injuries; "It's a huge change to go from flying a helicopter to struggling to go up 10 stairs." A spinal cord injury left his left leg paralyzed, necessitating the use of a wheelchair. Through perseverance, determination and extensive therapy, Gershony is now able to walk with the use of forearm crutches.

After speaking with family and friends and the parents of his late helicopter partner, Gershony vowed, "I got a second chance at life and will make the most of it."

Beit Halochem (Israel's organization for disabled veterans) and the Erez Foundation helped him to once again find fulfillment in sports, and he soon discovered his fit in wheelchair tennis. After intensive training, he joined the 2012 Paralympics team and represented Israel in London. Six years after his crash, Gershony scored Israel's first gold medal, with the announcer accurately proclaiming, "That's the smile of a winner, a winner in every field."

Wheelchair boxer Barré inspires with her determination

By ***Martin C. Barry***

Jani Barré is seen here in her corner of the ring during the wheelchair boxing match on May 18, 2019. (Photo courtesy of Jani Barré)

It's one thing to be one of the first two women ever in Quebec to compete in a boxing match while seated in a wheelchair. But as if that weren't enough, Jani Barré now also takes part in gruelling marathons while rolling in her wheelchair and has become a sought-after motivational speaker.

To say she's done a lot for someone who faced a major barrier at one time tells only part of the story. She is a woman who overcame her challenges and has gone on to teach others how they can do the same.

On May 18, 2019 – seven years to the day after she lost the use of her legs due to a rare bone disease – Barré, 39, a Sainte-Hyacinthe resident, got into a boxing ring in Sainte-Marie-de-Beauce with Tamara Bélisle, 26, another wheelchair-bound woman, for an amateur boxing match that would make history.

Challenge accepted

In an interview with *Inspirations*, Jani Barré explained what motivated her to take on the boxing challenge. Raised in a family in which boxing and other sports were considered important by her father Bernard, a sports commentator with Quebec's TVA network, Barré said she has been familiar with the sport. “When I was still young, like when I was just five, I was always seated in the front row. My father would place my wheelchair at the edge of the ring. I was absolutely fascinated by it,” said Barré, noting she was one of three girls in the family. Of the three, she was the only one who suffered from the chronic illness osteogenesis imperfecta, also known as brittle bone disease.

Rescued by the Shriners

Having suffered 157 bone fractures since birth (her father kept a detailed record of all of them), her life changed drastically for the better after undergoing eight years of experimental treatment using a new drug at the Shriners' Hospital of Montreal. It strengthened her fragile bones.

Since physical exercise was recommended by her doctors to accelerate the improvement, she decided to join her father at a boxing club, where she would work out gently using a punching bag, and lifting weights and throwing weighted balls. “After this I started to become stronger,” said Barré. “When I saw that my health was improving, I started to think it would be really fun to take part in a boxing match. That's all I could think about – going up against someone else who was in a wheelchair.”

Finding a worthy opponent

However, finding a suitable opponent turned out to be more of a challenge. After an exhaustive search of boxing clubs and associations in Quebec failed to find anyone else in a wheelchair who shared her passion for boxing, she used Facebook to spread the word. That's how she met Tamara Bélisle, who had been using a wheelchair since the age of 19 when she became paraplegic following a motorcycle accident. Bélisle didn't know a thing about boxing at that time. Still, Barré was able to talk her into learning and taking part in an event that she felt certain would make history by showing that two physically-challenged women could break down yet another barrier for the disabled by climbing up into the ring and taking part in a boxing match.

Rules of engagement

Although there was still some risk Barré might be prone to easy injury given her past medical problems, she said she felt confident going into the ring because it had been more than 15 years since she last suffered a bone fracture.

All the same, the two abided by some basic rules in order to avoid injuries: there would be three two-minute rounds; no uppercuts

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Adapted boxing builds strength, independence for Laval resident

By ***Wendy Singer***

Boxing was not on Claudia Bertrand's radar until she serendipitously met amateur boxer and coach Nick Tipaldos on the floor of World's Gym in Laval last November.

A vibrant, friendly, determined 20-year-old, Bertrand recently moved from Joliette to Laval to have more access to services and community, and in hopes of finding work. She has cerebral palsy (CP) and enjoys living on her own in an apartment with her dog Frapuccino.

Bertrand started boxing with Tipaldos last November. They were meeting twice weekly prior to the pandemic, and she was seeing encouraging results. Their workouts began with Bertrand standing in her walker, but balance issues made it challenging. Tipaldos did a little research online and discovered that other boxers with CP were kneeling while working out.

With the walker pushed aside, Bertrand got onto her knees on the mats and began punching like a champ, throwing strong uppercuts and jabs upon cue. Over the five months, she developed more upper body strength than she has ever had. This brought her more independence as she can do more around her apartment.

“I never ever thought that I would be able to box, and I never ever thought I would be this strong,” said Bertrand. “I recommend boxing to anyone, whether you are handicapped or not.”

Tipaldos is pleased with his student's progress and that she is getting as equal an opportunity as anyone else to box and get in shape. He is encouraged, seeing her punches get stronger and her reach higher. Bertrand is not quite ready to hit the bag, so for now, she lands her jabs in Tipaldos' boxing gloves.

Bertrand is finding that boxing is more than a great physical workout. “If I've had a bad day, a few punches help relieve my anger and frustration, and I feel a lot better!” she said.

Bertrand and Tipaldos are back at the gym after three-months of sheltering at home, and are very happy to continue where they left off.

Tipaldos deeply admires his trainee, telling her: “You have a lot of courage, and you inspire me.”

Claudia Bertrand and her trainer Nick Tipaldos after a workout at World's Gym.

Inclusion and sportsmanship score big on the ice for Crestview students

By *Iris Erdile*

The Crestview Elementary School hockey team celebrate after their hockey game (Photo, Jason Bergola)

There are certain days that go down in sports history: the time the Toronto Raptors won an NBA championship, when the Chicago White Sox finally won a world series championship after 88 years, and the day that the Stanley Cup was created in 1915. Though it is not well-known, January 23, 2020 was also a very important day in the history of sports in Laval. It was also a very important day for the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board (SWLSB) and Crestview Elementary School.

This is the day that the SWLSB hosted an inter-board hockey tournament at Laval's Bell Centre. Students from various Laval elementary schools competed, including Crestview. Members of the Laval community know that Crestview is a very special place with a big heart. It is an inclusive elementary school that has three streams: two special education streams with closed classes and one regular education stream that also includes special education students. No matter the stream, every student at Crestview belongs and is a cherished member of the community.

Students from all three programs represented their school on the ice as members of the Crestview Elementary School hockey team. There was just one problem: Crestview needed new hockey jerseys.

Nicholas Limberis, a student at SWLSB's Hillcrest Academy Elementary, heard about Crestview's need for new hockey jerseys. He acted quickly and selflessly, using his own money to buy jerseys so that the Crestview team could represent their school proudly. He then came to the tournament to present the jerseys to the Crestview team. Even Hope, Crestview's therapy dog, was happy to be sporting a beautiful, brand new hockey jersey.

The acts of inclusion, generosity and teamwork did not stop there. During the Crestview vs. St. Vincent Elementary School hockey game, the St. Vincent team saw that Crestview needed a bit of a boost. Team St. Vincent sent three of their best players over to the Crestview team to help make it more of an even playing field on the ice. When it came time to score the winning goal, however, all of the glory goes to Crestview. The players who worked together to win the game were Crestview students – from both the regular and special education streams.

Iris Erdile is a special education pedagogical consultant at the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board.

Postponed 2020 Tokyo games puts Levine's dreams on hold

In the special feature edition about the impact of COVID-19 that *Inspirations* released in May, we interviewed Alison Levine, number one boccia player in the world. This was supposed to be her year. We asked her about her journey to Paralympic fame and how she is adapting to sheltering at home and the postponement of the 2020 Paralympic Games. In the article, Levine shares how her new home training regimen is giving her body a physical break and her mind time to focus on the mental side of the sport. *Read more about Levine's journey in our special edition at www.inspirationsnews.com, click on the banner for our special edition and go to p. 7.*

Listen to the Inspirations *News Podcast with Mark Bergman as he chats with Alison Levine. You can find it on Soundcloud, Google Play or Apple Podcasts.*

Alison Levine is seen here concentrating as she throws a boccia ball at the 2019 Lima Parapan American Games last summer. Levine won the bronze medal in pairs at this event. (Photo, Canadian Paralympic Committee)

Wheelchair boxer continued from p. 37

allowed so that the wheelchairs couldn't be flipped backwards; no holding onto the wheelchairs' wheels; and punches only to the face.

Barré's health has improved so much since then, she said, she's now expanded her sports and training interests to include marathon events, in which she participates in her wheelchair alongside regular runners.

A seasoned marathoner

In September 2018, she became the first woman in the Montreal Marathon to finish the event while in a standard wheelchair. By early 2020, she had completed her fifth marathon: an event in Miami, Florida. The list of cities where she has done marathons includes Ottawa, Las Vegas and Havana. She's now planning to take part in her sixth marathon next December in Honolulu, Hawaii, with hopes of doing the Tokyo Marathon in 2021. Her goal is to eventually complete 10 world-class marathons. "If my health is as good as it is now it's because of all the sports I take part in," said Barré.

In the last four years, Barré has added motivational speaking to her growing CV. Her message: "Regardless of your situation, when you want to do something you can accomplish great things."

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

Galileo becomes the first adult centre in Quebec to offer a **multisensory room**

By *Wendy Singer*

In January, after much hard work and dedication, Galileo Adult Education Centre in Montreal North revealed its new state-of-the-art multisensory room, sponsored by Vanessa Grimaldi, founder of No Better You Foundation, Italiani di Montreal e Amici and Chez Ma Tante Restaurant. Grimaldi was a former special needs teacher at Galileo before she went on to international fame on the ABC reality show The Bachelor. "I am proud to say that Galileo is the first adult centre within the English Montreal school Board (EMSB) to have a multisensory room," said Martina Schiavone, principal of Galileo, while addressing sponsors, EMSB administrators, special guests and the Galileo community.

A sensory room (technically called a Snoezelen room and termed by Galileo as "the Snuggle Room") provides a multisensory environment that offers an array of interesting and controllable sensory experiences. While initially created for the school's 150 Social Integration Services (SIS) and Socio-vocational Integration Services (SVIS) students, some 100 academic and 400 common core basic education students will also benefit from the room. Situated in a large classroom on the school's second floor, it can accommodate six to eight adults at one time.

At the big reveal event, SIS students and teachers shared testimonials of their multisensory room experiences. Alexis Gerin-Lajoie has been a student at Galileo for three years and is overjoyed with the new room. "It is a place to help me relax and leave all my troubles behind. The room gives me my personal space where I can be alone with my thoughts. The sensory room means the world to us. We thank you for your support," said Gerin-Lajoie.


Students enjoy the new multisensory room at Galileo.

After a ribbon-cutting ceremony, guests toured the calming room, learning how the equipment is used and seeing demonstrations of its effectiveness by Galileo students. The culinary class prepared a delicious lunch which event attendees enjoyed afterwards. Grimaldi was touched and voiced how emotional this day was for her. Galileo is where her vision for the No Better You Foundation began. "It does not take going on a TV show where they hand out roses to do good. It's smiling at your neighbour and hanging out with a student who may not have any other students to hang out with. So be kind to one another," she said.

Galileo staff look very forward to next fall when they can all return to school and their students can enjoy the sensory room once again.

The 'Royal Oasis' provides calming space for Royal Charles Elementary students

By *Jennifer McNeil and James Jordan*

Recognizing the changing needs of the student population, the school team at Riverside School Board's Royal Charles Elementary in St. Hubert felt it imperative to adopt a school-wide approach to support certain students. With the assistance of professionals from our complementary services department, the "Royal Oasis" was born.

The Royal Oasis provides a calm, structured space that is designed to offer a wide variety of activities, both intervention and prevention-based to promote social-emotional learning. Through collaborative practice, the Royal Charles team joined forces with members of its school board's complementary services team, not only to design the space, but also to identify and purchase intervention materials. In order to maximize the benefits for students visiting the space, training on various research-based interventions and approaches that promote social-emotional learning was shared by professionals with the school team.


Zachary and Meaghan enjoy their quiet time in the Royal Oasis at Royal Charles Elementary School. (Photo, Riverside School Board)

The space serves as a tier of support outside of the classroom and is to be used when interventions within the classroom do not suffice. Although the Royal Oasis is designed to offer guided support by a special education technician or attendant, it can also be used to offer respite to students who are overwhelmed by the classroom environment. The space also serves as a lending "library" where teachers can borrow intervention tools (i.e. fidget and sensory tools, alternative seating options, games, children's literature, etc,) to gauge their effectiveness.

Teachers play a key role in determining who needs this level of support and actively support those students in identifying optimal times to visit the Royal Oasis. That said, self-regulation is promoted as students are encouraged to identify moments when time away from the classroom is necessary. Depending on their needs, the students that the room caters to does vary over time.

The path to the creation of the Royal Oasis was not obstacle-free. A small building required a shift in the use of space used by the daycare. Special funding for Special Needs from the Provincial Government as well as donations of materials by the school community allowed for the purchase of materials to furnish and supply this space. Moving from a consequence-based approach towards the increased use of preventative measures, the purpose of the space and fuller understanding of the role of the attendant and technician took place over several months.

The response from parents, students and the school team has been very positive. More students have become proactive and use the strategies that they were explicitly taught. Fewer students are seen at the office for a consequence.

Plans for future development include refining the quiet spaces within the classrooms, offering academic support within the Royal Oasis and the development of interactive hallways.

As a result of school preparations to receive students during the pandemic the space has been temporarily reconfigured so that it may be used as a location for a child who is exhibiting virus symptoms. As soon as possible the Royal Oasis will return as an important student support tool.

Jennifer McNeil is special education consultant, and James (Jim) Jordan is the principal at Royal Charles Elementary School at the Riverside School Board.

ADAPTED TRAVEL

DINING OUT IN THE BIG APPLE

By *Mike Cohen*

New York City is indeed the place to dine, with an endless array of choices to please your palate. Here are some tips from my latest trip.

TAO UPTOWN:

We were elated to get a reservation at TAO Uptown (www.taogroup.com), an upscale Pan-Asian brand, located at 42 East 58th Street. There is also a TAO Downtown, as well as locations in Las Vegas, Chicago and Los Angeles. They will open at Mohegan Sun casino and entertainment resort in Connecticut this year.

A 16-foot Buddha, which floats above a reflecting pool filled with Japanese carp, presides over the scene at Tao. A favourite destination for celebrities and athletes, this heavenly dining experience specializes in authentic Hong Kong Chinese, Japanese and Thai cuisines. Tao has three levels of dining including the prized "Skybox," which offers views of this former movie theatre unparalleled in New York. In addition to its 300 seats, Tao includes a sushi bar, lounge and two bars at which to enjoy the food and the show.

A look at TAO.

There is a wonderful ambiance here, with trendy music and a charismatic serving staff. The menu is truly designed for sharing. Our waiter Ryan made life so much easier for our party by recommending a series of courses “family style.” He was right on the mark with each one.

We started off with some drinks: A signature Tao-tini (Belvedere Mango Passion, Malibu Rum, cranberry and fresh lime), a glass of prosecco and a Bubbles and Berries (True Premium Vodka, Chandon Brut, St. Germain and fresh strawberries). We then moved to some appetizers: The Peking duck spring rolls with hoisin sauce, the spicy tuna tartare on crispy rice and the salmon sashimi followed by miso glazed Chilean sea bass, grilled 12-ounce imperial waygu ribeye (served with crispy fried onions, and wow, this was beyond amazing!) and lobster and kimchee fried rice.

Ryan promised us a surprise for dessert, and he was not kidding. Out came a very large tray featuring a giant fortune cookie (with white and dark chocolate mousse), flourless mochi cake, sugar dusted donuts, molten chocolate cake and vanilla ice cream with chocolate syrup. Let’s just say we completely ignored the calorie count.

TAO has a magnificent sushi menu. Let me just state that merely stepping inside TAO is an experience. This now represents a “must stop” for us. Hopefully next time out we can check out TAO Downtown.

There is easy street-level access by wheelchair. When making your reservation, ask for a table at the main level where there are no stairs. For reservations call 212-888-2288 or do so via Open Table.

BLACK TAP:

What fun it was for me to experience a Black Tap (www.blacktap.com) restaurant for the first time and no less their new flagship 35th Street location (known as Black Tap 35th). Inspired by the old-school luncheonettes we grew up in, Black Tap is touted as the new take on the classic burger joint. Upscale but not fussed-up, their award-winning burgers have gotten a lot of attention in a short amount of time, milkshakes have always been on the menu, and craft beer is part of their DNA.

Black Tap 35th serves as a core location for global menu testing, and features all new design elements, a private dining room, and more. There are also other locales on 55th Street and Soho as well as spots at Downtown Disney in Anaheim, California and at the Venetian in Las Vegas. Internationally you can find them in Bahrain, Kuwait, Singapore, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates.

I was impressed the moment I walked through the door. Tangible nods to Black Tap’s ‘80s and ‘90s hip-hop and pop soundtrack can be found throughout the space, including an installation of 5,000 custom-designed cassette tapes and an oversized neon boombox. At the stand-alone Shake Bar–the first in New York–guests can get a glimpse into the magic of making one of Black Tap’s famous milkshake creations and be able to interact with shake makers.

New York-based graffiti artists and twin brothers How and Nosm were tapped for Black Tap 35th’s signature street art murals. Known for their large-scale installations and unique, complicated compositions, How and Nosm left their mark on the restaurant with their signature style of red-, black- and white-based imagery with colourful pops of pink, yellow, and purple. The brothers drew inspiration from New York City life and the Black Tap brand itself for two custom pieces within the space.

Black Tap is always innovating and has kept the hits coming at Black Tap 35th. There are always new menu items hitting the tables here as Black Tap tests dishes for potential worldwide launches. All of the classics are here too, from the All-American Burger and the award-winning wagyu beef Greg Norman Burger to the fan-favorite Korean BBQ Wings and addicting Crispy Brussels Sprouts. And it wouldn’t be a meal at Black Tap without a CrazyShake. There’s something for every sweet tooth from the original Cotton Candy strawberry shake and the best-selling Cookie’s ‘N Cream Supreme shake, to the newly added Cinnamon Toast cereal-flavored Churro Choco Taco Shake topped with a Choco Taco ice cream treat and churros. Don’t forget the beverages. True to its name (a nod to craft beer bar tap handles), Black Tap 35th’s beer menu features New York regional specialties like The Bronx Brewery No Resolutions Imperial IPA and Greenport Harbor Beehave Summer Ale.

I started off with the Queso & Chips appetizer – zesty cheese served with warm tortilla chips and a house salad. The Old Fashioned Prime Burger was my main choice, topped with cremini mushrooms, melted swiss cheese, caramelized onions and horse radish with some crispy fries.

I did my best to conserve some appetite for a crazy shake and opted for the Cake Shake. This is a cake batter milkshake with a vanilla frosted rim and rainbow sprinkles, topped with Funfetti cake, whipped cream and a cherry. My server wisely recommended that I gently move the cake portion to a plate, enjoying every morsel. For the shake I used the spoon at the start before switching to the straw. It was worth all of the calories, especially knowing that I had an 11-block walk back to my hotel.

Black Tap.

As Assistant General Manager Amber North showed me, there is a wheelchair access ramp to the left of the front door that goes into the hotel next door, where there is a side entrance door into the restaurant. They have a few different seating places for wheelchair accessibility as well including an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) bar seating area that meets the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) regulations. The ADA accessible bathroom is located in the back of the restaurant off from the cassette room that is separate from the regular bathrooms located in a hallway that is off from the middle of the restaurant.

Black Tap 35th is located at 45 West 35th Street and open from 11 am to midnight daily. You can call 646-943-5135.

A BRAZILIAN DINING EXPERIENCE:

Fogo de Chão (fogo-dee-shown) is a leading Brazilian steakhouse, or churrascaria, specializing in the centuries-old Southern Brazilian cooking technique of churrasco – the art of roasting high-quality cuts of meats over open flame, all of which are carved tableside by Brazilian-trained gaucho chefs. There is Picanha (signature sirloin), Filet Mignon, Ribeye, Fraldinha (Brazilian sirloin) Cordeiro (lamb) and more. In addition to the main dishes, they boast a gourmet market table, authentic Brazilian side dishes, and an award-winning wine list.

Founded in Southern Brazil in 1979, there are currently 56 locations throughout Brazil, the United States, Mexico and the Middle East. I had a chance to experience this restaurant for the very first time at the beautiful West 53rd Street location in midtown Manhattan, just a short walk from Times Square and steps away from MoMA. Just before Christmas 2013, Fogo opened this 16,000 square foot flagship location. The stunning architectural design includes a 17-foot bas-relief sculpture of Antonio Caringi's, O Laçador, and a historical monument in Porto Alegre, Brazil. The three-level facility features al fresco patio dining and a lounge area that is perfect for gathering with friends. Unquestionably this was a totally new dining experience for me, and I was beyond impressed. For first-timers like me, you will need a little guidance in terms of how to navigate the menu. Manager Ricardo Oliveira and his staff did precisely that. This is a "fun" place to dine for sure.

I opted in favour of the Full Churrasco Experience, which for $69.95 includes the trained chefs coming to your table. All you need to do is flip this small circular card to the green side and you will receive a visit, getting a chance to select the precise cut of meat you want. Everything was so fresh and delicious, I found it hard not to keep flipping my card over. The beyond impressive market table and feijoada bar is included, featuring seasonal salads, soups, fresh vegetables, imported charcuterie, hearts of palm, giant asparagus, fresh buffalo mozzarella cheese, sun dried tomatoes, fresh cut and steamed broccoli, marinated artichoke bottoms, tabouleh, smoked salmon, an assortment of fine cheeses and much more. You can also order this for $34.95, and it can indeed constitute a meal.

Their market table is a fabulous way to get your meal started. The server also brought a basket of cheesy bread to the table and a delicious jumbo shrimp cocktail appetizer in a bowl of ice. Each piece of meat seemed better than the last, cutting like butter. A server came by and offered me some mashed potatoes and vegetables. There was not a moment during this dinner when either a server, chef or manager did not stop by to see if I needed anything else.

Fogo dry age Tomahawk.

As for my beverage, the guarana Antarctica is the national soda of Brazil and contains guarana berries found in the Amazon. The dessert menu fortunately had a calorie count, and I chose the Tres Leches Cake – a rich cake soaked in three types of milk then topped with vanilla mousse and salted caramel de leite. I enjoyed this with a cup of decaf cappuccino.

Next time I dine here, I will definitely try either the mango Chilean sea bass, pan-seared salmon and if I dine with my family, the seafood tower.

In addition to the Full Churrasco Experience, Fogo offers its guests multiple ways to enjoy the experience at varying price points, including weekday lunch starting at $15, weekend Brazilian brunch and a Bar Fogo menu that features smaller, sharable plates, Brazilian-inspired cocktails and happy hour.

The facility is fully wheelchair accessible, with an elevator on each floor. For more information about Fogo de Chão, the new culinary additions or to make dining reservations, visit *http://www.fogo.com.* You can reach the West 53rd location at 212-969-9980.

A FINE IRISH PUB:

Located just up the block from my hotel, The Algonquin, is O'Donoghue's Restaurant and Pub *(https://odpubnyc.com)* at 156 West 44th Street. I have been walking by the place for several years now, intrigued by the lineups outside. Well, this place indeed exudes Irish warmth. Manager Helen Moran is from Ireland and so was my charming server Sarah. With 24 beers on tap, 10 HD plasma flat screens and traditional Irish and American cuisine, O'Donoghue's is the perfect place to unwind after work (happy hour specialty drinks), for sporting events (showing all major sports channels) and private parties (party packages available). They are right in the middle of the Theatre District, so this is the perfect place to stop by for pre/post-theatre meal and drinks, or if you're just shopping around town.

I had tickets for a 7:30 pm musical close by, so I arrived at 6 pm. The service was impeccable, and I enjoyed my meal at a good pace, finishing with more than sufficient time to be sitting in my seat 10 minutes before the curtain went up.

There is a regular menu as well as those for kids, late night, weekend brunch and another just for the bar. They also have daily specials. I started off with some piping hot beef and barley soup, a delicious order of garlic cheesy bread with marinara sauce, and a glass of prosecco wine. For the main course I was debating between their signature burger, one of the sandwiches and the special chicken and mashed potatoes. I opted for the latter. The chicken was cut in neat thin slices, moist and extremely tasty. I made the right choice. Did I have room for dessert? The homemade apple pie with vanilla ice cream sounded like the perfect way to conclude dinner. Along with a fresh cup of decaf coffee I finished every morsel, leaving over just a bit of the ice cream.

There is a great atmosphere in this place. You can call 212-997-2262 for reservations. The restaurant is wheelchair accessible, with a level entrance.

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O'Donoghue's Restaurant

Autism Speaks Canada

funds initiatives on cyber security, virtual dentist visits and sport

By *Randy Pinsky*

AUTISM SPEAKS® CANADA
FAMILY SERVICES
COMMUNITY GRANTS
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Autism Speaks Canada is celebrating the 10th anniversary of its Family Services and Community Grant Program. “We are proud to mark this milestone,” said Krista Leitham, regional manager for Quebec and Eastern Canada. “I applaud the collaboration between non-profits and research groups working to expand the delivery and capacity of services.”

Here are the 2019 grant recipients led by Quebec providers and their partners.

The Cyber Security/ Cyber Secure Program

The Cyber Security/Cyber Secure Program is led by the Giant Steps Resource and Training Centre, CANeLearn, and LEARN Quebec. Kelly Bron Johnson, project manager at Giant Steps School, explained that autistic individuals are more susceptible to problems online due to difficulties in decoding social cues. The American Cyber Bullying Research Center reflects on this “subjective blindness” which can lead to autistic individuals either falling victim to or else unintentionally being complicit of inappropriate online behaviour. In both cases, instances are often underreported.

Cyber safety thus works in two ways: Preventing people with autism from being preyed upon, and conveying socially acceptable (and non-acceptable) behaviours.

Johnson has created a variety of comprehensive scenarios (to be translated into French and provided in American Sign Language) to explain the often perplexing social decorum of what is and what is not acceptable to ask and what information to share. “The cyber security program is intended to teach autistic people to be safe and independent on the web,” explained Johnson. Scenarios are presented in a collaborative manner to educate and empower, as opposed to shield and block.

Using virtual reality to reduce anxiety at the dentist

Visits to the dentist are one of a parent’s most challenging tasks, but imagine how it is for children with autism, who are faced with unfamiliar sounds, a stranger being close to them and sensory overload. In addition, dentists often lack the training to address particular needs or triggers. It was in response to this very real problem that the Virtual Reality for Anxiety Desensitization for Dental Clients with Autism initiative was launched.

Joining forces were McGill University’s Faculty of Dentistry, the See Things My Way Centre for Innovation Dental Clinic, the Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital and Shaftesbury VR to create virtual reality “dry-runs” of a typical visit to the dentist to reduce anxiety and promote oral health.

The program focuses on autistic individuals aged 14 to 65 who are less likely to be insured under provincial plans. Jonathan Lai, a researcher at The Miriam Foundation, described how they simulate the entire dental experience - from arrival, to sitting in the chair, to the check-up itself. Specialized clinics are already in place at See Things My Way and the Montreal General Hospital.

“People with disabilities have a lot of trouble accessing health care appropriate for them,” said Lai. As a result, many practitioners must resort to measures such as restraints or anesthesia.

In working with Chantal Czerednikow of the McGill Faculty of Dentistry, Lai proudly noted: “We are working to evaluate the best system with the least possible stress and the most amount of dignity.”

Special Olympics Québec’s Unified Sport program

Special Olympics Québec’s (SOQ) integrated sports initiative, “Unified Sport,” is an educational program introducing individuals with special needs to team sports. The organization matches players with neurotypical counterparts of comparable levels, where all can improve their skills, and even often beat other teams. “In such a balanced competitive environment, there are no glaring wins or losses,” said Madeleine Sinclair, SOQ Youth Programs coordinator.

In spite of the fact that their celebratory tournament at McGill University had to be postponed, Unified Sport has helped students build confidence, think on their feet and bounce back from mistakes. “Many are serious athletes with high expectations,” shared Sinclair, and participants are eager to return to the court once quarantine has been lifted.

DAWN discusses barriers faced by women with disabilities

The DisAbled Women’s Network (DAWN) of Canada was founded in 1985 following a meeting between 17 women from across Canada who came together to discuss issues of mutual concern including the barriers that women with disabilities face. On May 19, they hosted “Girls Without Barriers: A conversation” online, covering topics such as capacity building and identifying gaps in rights for young women with special needs. In the words of moderator Nelly Bassily, “Accessibility can’t be an afterthought – it needs to be centered at every step of design and delivery.”

The organization’s mission centres around the need for a greater focus on “civil society’s ‘forgotten population,” showcasing initiatives made for and led by leaders in the community such as the Black Girls Summer Workshop. The event coincided with the launching of DAWN Canada’s 148-page report entitled “An Intersectional Feminist Analysis of Girls and Young Women with Disabilities,” and explored what an accessible, barrier-free world would look like. *Visit dawncanada.net for more information.*

– *Randy Pinsky*

Enabling Accessibility Fund – small projects component open for applications

The Canadian government has launched its call for proposals under the newly modernized **Enabling Accessibility Fund (EAF)** small projects component. This initiative provides funding to organizations for small-scale construction, renovation or retrofit projects that enable persons with disabilities to live and work in more inclusive and accessible communities.

This year, instead of the originally allotted 12 months to complete a project, organizations that apply for funding will now have up to 24 months. Additionally, projects approved for funding will now be 100 percent funded to a maximum of $100,000. Applications will be accepted until July 13, 2020,

Enabling Accessibility Fund – Youth

The EAF's youth innovation component engages and challenges youth leaders to volunteer and collaborate with local community based organizations, and apply for funding up to **$10,000 for accessibly projects**. The call for expressions of interest for youth leaders will close on October 30, 2020.

For information, visit Canada.ca, search for Employment and Social Development Canada and search for Enabling Accessibility Fund or Enabling Accessibility Fund - Youth.


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