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"Facilitating a better quality of life for all our residents is a constant concern for me and my administration. This is why we adopted the Municipal Universal Accessibility Policy - to create an inclusive environment for everyone. Giving proper consideration to those with disabilities, while recognizing their personal contributions to the development of our community, is a way of showing respect for differences while underscoring each person's ability to participate fully in the life of their city." - Mayor Denis Coderre

*Read about our highlighted Montreal organizations on pages 25 and 26 of this edition.
(Photo credit, Green Apple Studio)*



Senator Chantal Petitclerc competing in the Rolling Rampage 2016 on Parliament Hill. Read our one-on-one with the Senator on page 13 of this edition. (Photo credit, Peter Thornton Communications)

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**SYLVAN ADAMS
YM-YWHA**
CCJ BEN WEIDER JCC
HARRY BRONFMAN YCC

Marlene & Joel King

Special Needs Department

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This initiative is based on the idea that education, recreation and leisure are for everyone, regardless of age and abilities, and that everyone belongs to the Y.

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"Inclusion is what we do. It's the attitude we have. It is the way we treat others and the way they treat us. Inclusion is the opportunity to learn together and from one another. And we do it because it is the right thing to do... Inclusion is not a service, placement, or program...Inclusion is a MINDSET" by Lisa Friedman, 2013.



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LEGO BUILDING	4 - 12 years
SENSORY ART	4 - 12 years
YCC DAY CAMPS (SPECIAL NEEDS SPECIALTY)	4 - 12 years
MULTIMEDIA CLUB	16 - 25 years
CHAVERIM	20 - 35 years
MISCHAKIM	30 - 45 years

Adults



CLUB RENDEZ-VOUS DROP-IN CENTRE	18 years +
KOULEINU YACHAD: WE ALL BELONG	16 years +
SUNDAY LEISURE TIME	50 years +
FAMILY OUTREACH PROGRAM	
VISUAL ART FOR ADULTS	20 years +
• MIXED MEDIA	
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Special Needs Family Camp ext. 267
Special Needs Programming ext. 235
Y Cycle for Special Needs ext. 228



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Y Cycle

Ride for Special Needs!

September 17, 2017



60 km
100 km

Proceeds from our annual Y Cycle for Special Needs are used to support the Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA Special Needs department, which provides children, adolescents and adults with intellectual and physical disabilities with the opportunity to participate in programs that take place at the Y.



Epilepsy: Canadian organizations support research and raise awareness

By Elaine Cohen

The odds are you know someone with epilepsy. The seizure causing disorder affects one in 100 Canadians. About 15,500 Canadian cases of epilepsy are diagnosed annually. There is no cure for the condition, but medication allows up to 70 percent of those living with epilepsy to manage the seizures and live productive lives.

Gary Collins, president of Epilepsy Canada, one of the leading advocates for epilepsy research, says, awareness of epilepsy and its effects on families has been muted by the historical reluctance of patients to talk about their disorder. "When a person is diagnosed with epilepsy they are immediately subjected to a series of restrictions. Their driver's license is suspended, they can lose their standing at school, and in many cases become subject to job discrimination." The fears of others and the stigma that accompanies epilepsy has, until recently, discouraged people with epilepsy from speaking out.

It is interesting to note that Epilepsy Canada was founded in Montreal but is now headquartered in Markham, Ontario. Epilepsy Canada is an important funder of epilepsy research at Canadian hospitals and universities. It is celebrating its 50th anniversary and assists those with epilepsy to tell their stories. You can read some of them at www.epilepsy.ca.

Epilepsy is characterized by sudden, brief changes in how the brain functions. It is a symptom of a neurological disorder that affects the brain and results in seizures. The latter is an outward sign of a temporary electrical dysfunction of the controls of the brain. A seizure may appear as a convulsion, a brief stare, muscle spasms, odd sensations or altered consciousness. Although many people can be successfully treated, research is needed to find a solution. Drugs are not a cure and work better for some than others.

The Savoy Foundation

The legacy of American-born, pro-active visionary George A. Savoy illustrates how tolerance, education and support for medical research have improved the quality of life for thousands with epilepsy. Savoy came to



George A. Savoy
(Photo credit, The Savoy Foundation)

Quebec in 1921 to manage his ledger business. In the early years, Savoy was called upon to supply items Dr. Herbert Jasper, a pioneer in Electroencephalogram (EEG) testing, needed at the Montreal Neurological Institute (MNI). Dr. Jasper and MNI founder Dr. Wilder Penfield used EEG tests to pinpoint the source of seizures in epilepsy and other brain disorders. Savoy developed fan-folded and EEG lined paper first used at the MNI. He also empathized with the needs of people with epilepsy and immersed himself in several organizations and fundraising programs. To counter sectarianism, Savoy built Dieppe House, an inclusive institution that served as a home for individuals with epilepsy. Subsequently, renamed Foyer Savoy, the facility was sold in 1988. Proceeds were used to increase the endowment of the Savoy Foundation.



Johanne Gaudet cuddles daughter, Emma.
(Photo courtesy of Johanne Gaudet)

A spokesperson for the foundation recently pointed out, Savoy is the only private Canadian foundation that distributes large amounts specifically for epilepsy research at hospitals and universities in Canada. Close to \$400,000 are dispersed annually in studentships, fellowships and grants.

Since the 1930s, family members George Arthur Savoy, Paul Savoy, Harolde J. Savoy, George M. Savoy, Caroline Savoy and Sophie Savoy, along with generous donors, have consistently supported research in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of epilepsy. For information, visit www.savoy-foundation.ca.

Parents share stories and offer advice

JoAnne Mosel and Johanne Gaudet are savvy parents of children with epilepsy. They share their experiences with readers and offer practical tips.

JoAnne Mosel's adult son has a neurological disorder that manifests mainly in sleep issues, traits of autism spectrum disorder and seizures. "The seizures and side effects of the medication he takes to control them impact his gait and energy levels," she said.

Mosel believes Richard was probably having absence type seizures most of his childhood. "We only began to medicate him at 13. At 18, he experienced his first generalized tonic-clonic (grand mal) seizure. Richard has been on many different medications."

Mosel encourages parents not to hesitate when it comes to questioning pediatricians. "I wish I knew then what I know now. Young parents today are still unsure of how to proceed when they suspect their child may be seizing."

Gaudet, a resident of Saint-Lin, is the mother of Emma, five-and-a-half. Emma has Shaaf-Yang syndrome, which is caused by heterozygous mutation in the MAGEL 2 gene. Although Emma has faced multiple challenges since birth, she did not have a seizure until July 2016. "Emma's absence (petit mal) seizures tired her out and nothing [medication] helped until December, when we found two drugs that worked together. So far, she has been okay," Gaudet said, adding Emma cannot communicate but is a happy child and is able to entertain herself tuning into Disney movies on her iPad.

INSPIRATIONS

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"Do not despair," she advises parents. "It's a long process and very frustrating but there is hope. It takes time." Several caregivers interviewed expressed similar views. Although it took time to find the right prescription and build up a level, patience and compliance did pay off.

(Epilepsy Canada input courtesy of Phillip Newsome, Telescope Brand Vision)



The Gold Centre is a private, not-for-profit organization supported by the Miriam Foundation with a mission to develop services, research and knowledge transfer, as well as provide programs to support people with autism spectrum disorders and developmental disabilities.

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Make It Matter (MIM) is a non-profit organization that funds initiatives that support quality education for all learners. MIM is creating a support system for administrators, educators, parents and learners in need of financial assistance to ensure the success of every child.

*It matters when we **Make it Matter**. Together we make it happen.*

Visit www.makeitmattertoday.org to learn more



The Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2017

Catherine Burrell: An advocate for LIFE

Dynamic Funds
Invest with advice.

By Wendy Singer

Special education technician Catherine Burrell did not plan on a career in the field of education. She only realized her passion for education while volunteering at her children's school. She found reading to students so fulfilling (for both herself and the students) that instead of going back to work as a computer programmer when her youngest started school, she changed her focus and took a job at Dorset Elementary School. At the same time, she went back to school to study inclusive education.

In 2005, Burrell became a special education technician with the Lester B. Pearson School Board's (LBPSB) Centre for Excellence in Autism. In this role, she interacted with many children with autism from the ages of four to 21. This global vantage point changed her outlook. "It showed me what you can accomplish between those years, and just how much you can teach students so they can learn every possible skill," said Burrell.

Burrell moved on to work at Riverdale High School, where she taught a life skills class, which included a catering project. This prepared her for her participation in the inception of The LIFE (Learning Independence through Functional Education) Program. Burrell saw the benefits of baking; the repetition of creating the same cake over and over again lending itself naturally to learning new skills.

Created in 2012 by a team which included consultant for special needs Celina Bérubé, The LIFE Program received invaluable support from Cindy Finn, director of Student Services at LBPSB, and the Pearson Education Foundation, which donated a freezer. Now under the umbrella of Horizon High School, LIFE is located at Lindsay Place High School, boasting a comfortable communal area, a spacious kitchen, a workroom and a computer area. Their nine students with special needs are developing the knowledge, skills and confidence necessary to be as independent as possible. In collaboration with community partners, the program supports their students as they begin their transition from high school into the community.

In addition to their catering services, of which the LBPSB is a regular customer, they run a lamination branch, a greeting

card business under the guidance of volunteer Angela Whelton, and offer students as many work experiences both in-school and in the community as possible.

"Catherine is patient, and so in touch with the students. We've witnessed a lot of growth," said LIFE teacher Cindy Andersen. "Our goal is to make our students as independent as possible."

"These students don't need to sit in Grade 11 until they are 21," shared Burrell. "Here we have three years that are there for the taking, and we teach them everything we can."

Burrell carefully pairs students together so their skill sets complement one another, and takes great joy in seeing friendships blossom. She recently introduced the Make It Together lunch project where students shop for ingredients and make their own lunch at school. "They learn it on Monday, and repeat it on Tuesday," explained Burrell, who knew this project was a success when, at a recent parent-teacher interview, a father told her that his son was making his own sandwiches for the first time.

Diisa Niemi, vice-principal of Horizon High School, describes Burrell as caring and compassionate. "She promotes a sense of pride in her students, goes above and beyond, and keeps trying until she finds something that clicks."

Finn marvels at Burrell's aptitude at seeing the individual strengths and abilities of each student, and how she uses them to create innovative learning opportunities. "Catherine is a champion for students who learn differently, and understands the importance of transition planning for secondary students with special needs. She's a true advocate for students making the important transition beyond high school," wrote Finn in an email.

Burrell believes that with a little creativity, much can be accomplished. "All of our students have wonderful gifts. They're all really different. And they all deserve to use those gifts to the best of their abilities," said Burrell.

For information on the LIFE Program or catering contact Celina Bérubé at cberube02@lbpsb.qc.ca or (514) 422-3000 #32410. If you have a Teacher of Inspiration to nominate, email us at wendyinspirations@gmail.com.



Cynthia Andersen, teacher; Diisa Niemi, vice-principal; Alex Slater, student; Catherine Burrell, special education technician; Maria Nanos, integration aide; and Tevin Morrison Davis, student in the LIFE classroom at Lindsay Place High School.

Dynamic Funds is one of Canada's most recognized asset management firms. We offer a comprehensive range of products and services, spanning every major sector, geographic region and investment discipline. Dynamic's actively managed investment solutions add value to a wide variety of accounts, including fee-based, tax-advantaged, and customized high-net-worth programs.

Youth of Inspiration: Student receives the Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers award

Kyle Taylor is a caring, gentle, generous and empathetic Grade 6 student who attends Coronation Elementary School. This school year, he has volunteered during his lunchtime, four days a week, helping the junior ASD class. He supervises the students by eating and playing with them in their classroom. He also volunteered to supervise and mentor the transition of one of the ASD students into the schoolyard and cafeteria.

The one day during the week that Kyle is not with this group, he volunteers in the school's 'Kids for Social Change' group, where they discuss social issues and implement projects to better Coronation Elementary, the local and international communities. Kyle has been a reliable member of the group and a consistent contributor to the well-being of the school community.

Kyle was one of the children selected for the 2017 Governor General's "Sovereign's Medal for Volunteers" award. It

was presented to him by Craig Kielburger, founder of Free The Children at We Day Montreal on February 24, 2017.

Would you like to nominate a Youth of Inspiration or sponsor this new segment in Inspirations? Contact us at wendyinspirations@gmail.com.



Craig Kielburger, founder of Free The Children, Valerie Chiniara, the teacher who nominated Kyle for the award, Kyle Taylor, and Joanna Genovezos, principal of Coronation Elementary School.

(Photo credit, Coronation Elementary School)



Inspirations Notebook

Wendy Singer



Make It Matter (MIM) is a newly formed non-profit organization founded by **Deborah Athanasopoulos** and **Olivia Sheehy-Gennarelli** that funds project-specific initiatives that support quality education for all learners. This dynamic duo and their energetic team believe that all learners are entitled to academic resources that enhance their educational experience. MIM is the link between the community and the classrooms that allows this to happen. As they grow, Make It Matter will help educators bring about change by funding projects and resources. They will accept applications, and select two or more projects to fund annually.

On May 6, 2017, MIM hosted their inaugural event, The Funfair Fundraiser at Kandy Art Gallery. We are honoured that MIM chose Inspirations as their first funding recipient, along with St. Gabriel Elementary School. The event was a tremendous success!

Visit www.makeitmattertoday.org for information.

The Rare Diseases Salon, organized by **Regroupement Québécois des maladies orphelines (RQMO)**, took place on February 21 at Complex Desjardins, right in the heart of downtown Montreal. It was located in a busy, open space to attract, expose, and educate the public about the over 7,000 rare diseases that approximately one in 20 (or 500,000) Quebecers live with.

This event included over 20 exhibitors, many of which were represented by people who live with rare diseases that were eager to share their experiences with visitors. Exhibitors included Quebec associations representing Turner syndrome, spina-bifida and hydrocephalus, scleroderma, aplastic anemia, Angelman syndrome, and dwarfism, to name a few.

In addition, speakers shared their stories of living with a rare disease on a public stage for all to hear. President of RQMO **Gail Ouellette** provided these organizations with an important opportunity to reach out to and educate a large, receptive audience.

On January 19 tennis pro **Geoffrey Moore** hosted the One Love for Tennis fundraising event at Locale 514. 'One Love' in tennis parlance is a score that indicates the beginning of a match. It also indicates the universal love and respect expressed by all people for all people, regardless of race, creed, colour or social status.

The event welcomed beginners, pros, and internationally ranked tennis players, and featured music by former world doubles champion, **Jean-Guy Sauvé** and current top nationally ranked veteran, **Christian Laurin**, his wife **Francine** and daughter **Catherine**.

Over \$7,500 was raised for **Pro Set Autism**, and Tennis for All Uganda. Pro Set Autism is a Montreal and Ottawa-based sports program that offers adapted sports programs for children with special needs, including autism, and programs for teens and adults that miss the connection in mainstream sport clubs.

Every two years, the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec (OPHQ) awards the Prix À part entière to individuals, organizations and municipalities that are demonstrating exemplary commitments to breaking down barriers and promoting inclusion for people with disabilities.

This year's winner in the non-profit organization category was **Pleins Rayons**. Located in the Brome-Missisquoi region, Pleins Rayons teaches bicycle mechanics to students who are at risk or who have autism, and young adults with intellectual disabilities that are 21 and older.

Lakeshore Soccer Club received the jury's Coup de Coeur for their work with the **Super Sonics Soccer** program. Created in 2008, it was the first program in Quebec to offer soccer programs that support and welcome athletes of all abilities, encouraging social participation through physical activity. This year marks the 10th anniversary of Super Sonics!

Other winners included **France Geoffroy** for her work as a pioneer of integrated dance

in Quebec, the council of the Abitibiwinni First Nation, and CIUSSS de la Mauricie-et-du-Centre-du-Québec.

Winners received their awards at a ceremony in Quebec City on November 18 from Minister **Lucie Charlebois**, and **Stéphane Laporte**, jury member, and event spokesperson. **Kelly-Anne Soutter**, director general of Lakeshore Soccer Club, and **Stephan Marcoux**, director general of Pleins Rayons, were present to receive their awards.

The fourth edition of the **Montreal Autism in Motion** Conference and Exhibit took place on March 26. This year's conference, themed 'Building inclusive communities', engaged, inspired and motivated all in attendance.

The conference opened with a keynote address by teacher-turned-social media star **Chris Ulmer**, who is giving children with special needs a chance to speak and a place to shine with his video project *Special Books by Special Kids*. Previously a soccer coach, when Ulmer serendipitously became a special education teacher, he was surprised at how instantaneously he fell in love with his students.

In his videos, Ulmer engages neurodiverse individuals through the power of acceptance, empathy, and positivity. When he shared a video online that featured his morning ritual of positively greeting his students in his Florida-based classroom, it went viral, catapulting his project onto the world's stage. Now boasting over one million followers on Facebook, Ulmer's ultimate message is that everything starts with belief. Watch his touching, and telling, videos at www.specialbooksbyspecialkids.org.

Mark Wafer is the owner of six Tim Horton's franchises in Toronto and is deaf. He presented the business case for inclusive hiring to the Montreal Autism in Motion audience. Wafer's workforce includes 46 people with disabilities, and 200 that are non-disabled. In his 22 years of business, he has never filled out a workman's compensation claim for someone with a disability. The absenteeism rate for his disabled workforce is 85 percent lower than in his non-disabled workforce, and the turnover rate is under 49 percent (compared to over 100 percent for non-disabled).

Wafer commented that time and again he sees his employees with disabilities excelling and setting workplace standards for his other employees. "I have 14,000 customers a day, in which 7,000 are directly affected

by disability, be it their own or someone in their life. This is a number that no business anywhere in Canada can ignore."

Other speakers included **Frédéric Bisson**, radio host and person living with Asperger syndrome, **Isabelle Soulières**, professor of psychology and researcher, and the film *Life, Animated* was screened. Congratulations to conference organizers **Tracy Pennimpede** and **Andre Pereira**, and the team from Giant Steps School, for this tremendous opportunity to connect, share and learn.

Film director **Yonatan Nir** visited Montreal on February 14 after screening his film *My Hero Brother* at the Santa Barbara Film Festival, and winning both Best Documentary and the Audience awards. Welcomed warmly by **Helene Donath** of Club ALink, Nir, a native of Israel, graciously responded to questions and comments after a screening of the film. *My Hero Brother* delves into the intricate relationships of neurotypical and Down syndrome siblings. It opens up a much needed and desired discussion, and presents an opportunity for other siblings to connect and plan their own adventures. Read about *My Hero Brother* in our Arts & Entertainment section, page 16.

The Giant Steps community was deeply saddened to learn of the passing of **Darlene Berringer**, the founder of the school and its driving force for many years. Berringer was a true visionary and applied many groundbreaking ideas and approaches to the teaching of students with autism.

Berringer began her revolutionary project with a handful of staff and students in a church basement in Pointe-Claire in the early 1980s. With incredible determination, she built her dream into a respected, one of a kind school, which grew to include satellite schools in several other Canadian, American and Australian cities.

"Darlene possessed a strong and colourful personality, and creativity and idealism pervaded all aspects of her life and work. She was a passionate supporter of inclusiveness, long before the term was in common usage," shared **Ross White** of Giant Steps School. "Her dedication and devotion to Giant Steps, and in particular to our students, was unparalleled. She wanted nothing but the best for people with autism, and would accept no less. Each staff, student and parent at Giant Steps owes Darlene a tremendous debt of gratitude, and we will continue to work to ensure that her legacy is honoured into the future."



Giant Steps School will celebrate Darlene Berringer's life at an evening memorial event on May 30 at Loyola High School. Past and present parents, staff and students are invited to attend as well as anyone else who was influenced and impacted by Darlene. For information or to RSVP contact Marla at mcable@giantstepsmontreal.com or (514) 935-1911, #237.

Have you been cheering on Team Inspiration? On April 22 and 23 we walked and ran at the Scotia Bank Charity Challenge! Our mission was to raise funds, build our community, and spread awareness about the special needs community.

Team Inspirations was 35 participants strong. While the majority of us walked 5k, some ran five, 10 and even 21k. Amongst us was our team Ambassador **Jay Jones-Doyle**, who is an accomplished young man who has much to share about not letting your disability define your success. His columns are a highlight of each of our editions. Our EMSB co-chairs **Lori Rubin**, behavior management specialist, and **Katherine Baker**, physical education and health consultant, ran 5k in support of their students. Inspirations contributor **Valentina Basilicata** represented Laval, and **Sherri MacCallum**, special education technician at Lakeside Academy of the Lester B. Pearson School Board, and our first Caregiver of Inspiration recipient, represented the West Island.

We thank everyone who has donated to *Inspirations*. Although the race has passed, our fundraising page is online until May 22, 2017. We invite you to donate at <https://goo.gl/oPA06N>. Tax receipts will be issued for donations of \$10 or more.

The Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities held their annual Parent Conference: Toolbox for Success on April 23 to great success. Amongst the list of informative speakers was Montreal comedian **Joey Elias**, who shared his experience finding ways to live comfortably with anxiety, OCD and ADD. Elias had the crowd in the palm of his hand while sharing personal tips on how he manages anxiety. His natural gift of humour had his audience roaring with laughter. Elias shed light on anxiety and mental health, and assured his audience that they were not alone.

If you have tidbits or events to share, connect with me at wendyinspirations@gmail.com or (514) 483-7200 #7244.



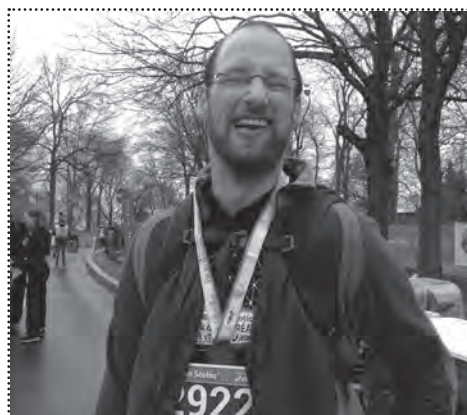
Co-founders of Make It Matter Olivia Sheehy-Gennarelli and Deborah Athanasopoulos.



Lise Daigle (left) and Charles DeBroin (right) from the Angelman syndrome Foundation of Quebec, with Gail Ouellette (middle) at complexe Desjardins.



Team Inspirations at the Scotia Bank Charity Challenge.



Jay Jones-Doyle at the finish line at the Scotia Bank Charity Challenge at Parc Jean Drapeau.



Front row: Pauline Lemieux, vice-president of the board, OPHQ; Stéphane Laporte, jury member and Prix spokesperson, Lucie Charlebois, Minister for Rehabilitation, Youth Protection, Public Health and Healthy Living. Back: Michael Burns, trainer, Lakeshore Soccer Club, Kelly-Anne Soutter, director general, Lakeshore Soccer Club, Véronique Tremblay, parliamentary assistant to Lucie Charlebois. (Photo credit, OPHQ)



Minister Lucie Charlebois with Stephan Marcoux, director general of Pleins Rayons at the Prix A part entière award ceremony. (Photo credit, OPHQ)



Steven Atme and Randy Pinsky, coordinator of Team Inspirations, Scotia Bank Charity Challenge, pose at the Montreal Autism in Motion Conference and Exhibit.



Pam Wener and Joey Elias at the MCLD conference at Ruby Foo's Hotel.



Lori Rubin, Diane Longo, and Ann Watson walked and ran for Team Inspirations at Parc Jean Drapeau.



Rebbetzin Marci Whitman, Yonatan Nir, and Fran Cohen at a screening of My Hero Brother at the Adath Israel Congregation.



Marla Cable, Seiun Thomas Henderson, Chris Ulmer, Nick Katalifos and Andre Perreira at the Montreal Autism in Motion Conference and Exhibit 2017. Missing from the photograph: Tracy Pennimpede.



The late Darlene Berringer making music with a Giant Steps student. (Photo credit, Giant Steps School)



Springdale Elementary School pilots CASP

By Pamela Normandin

CASP is a Ministry of Education program that has been developed for students aged six to 15 with a moderate to severe intellectual delay. The CASP (Competency-based Approach to Social Participation) program provides students with learning experiences that are relevant and meaningful. The goal is to equip students with special needs with skills that will give them greater autonomy at school, at home, and in their community.

The strength of the program lies in its focus on social participation. Academic content is embedded in the social competencies that make up the program. CASP is designed to facilitate autonomy and promote self-determination. Students learn skills that allow them to start to make decisions, perform daily living tasks, express preferences, and solve problems to the best of their ability. The ultimate goal is that CASP students will have more control over their own lives.

A CASP pilot project was implemented in seven school boards throughout Quebec in the 2015-16 school year. Springdale Elementary within the Lester B. Pearson School Board was chosen to participate, representing the only English-language school board in the pilot project.

Springdale had two classes participate: an inclusive Grade 3 and Grade 5 class with Mrs. Di Valerio, and a smaller more specialized Cycle 1 class with Ms. Stilton. The CASP team included the two classroom teachers, the resource teacher, the principal, and two professionals from Student Services at the LBPSB. Incoming principal Kerry Ann Payette enthusiastically took on the challenge of helping implement the pilot.

A day in the life of students following the CASP program may include: Practicing math by sorting money and figuring out how much is needed to buy something; helping recycle by picking up classroom bins and collecting them for the school; helping the school secretary with attendance; and deliv-

ering milk to friends.

The Springdale experience was very positive, and resulted in some very exciting learning activities and projects created. It presented a steep learning curve, and working with both the Quebec Education Program and the CASP program within one classroom brought forth some additional challenges. The team agreed that the CASP program addressed the needs of their students because of the focus on social participation and the relevant, meaningful learning experiences.

This year, the Springdale CASP team used the tools they developed for planning, implementing, evaluating and reporting on CASP learning elements, and expanded the project to include more students and teachers in the school.

We will be looking to our teachers to take a leadership role as this program is extended to the rest of the school board and becomes mandatory across the province.



Student learns about money at Springdale Elementary.
(Photo credit: Adriana Di Valerio)

Pamela Normandin is a consultant for Special Needs at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.



Educational programs teach adults vocational, life skills

By Joanne Charron

Transitioning to adulthood can be daunting, but it doesn't have to be. There are professionals in place to support you. Your principal, staff, and resource teachers are there to guide you and your child into the adult world.

TEVA (Transitions educative vie actif) consultants provide services as well. They are responsible for two dossiers – TEVA, and the Axes 2 and 3 of the MELS-MSSS Entente. They work closely with the different professionals of your school board's Student Services Department as well as special needs students (students with handicaps, mental health issues or difficulties), and with the students and their families. Their role is to facilitate access to services from the Health and Social Services Sector and to facilitate the transition when they leave the Youth Sector. They also establish and maintain a collaborative relationship with partner organizations in order to facilitate

access to services for students in need.

They are aware of the programs and services available for your child to transition into, and know which programs are most beneficial and comply with your child's needs. Some wonderful programs are the SVIS and SIS.

The SVIS (Social Vocational Integration Services) is a program to teach vocational and work preparation skills to students with mild intellectual and learning disabilities moving towards employment goals.

SVIS targets adults who need support in developing their academic potential and who also need help integrating into society and the labor market. Students in this program are encouraged to take charge of their own learning so they can develop the competencies they will need to meet the challenges associated with the new realities of the

world of work. Punctuality, appropriateness, appearance, basic French, English and math skills are taught, always aimed at independent living and getting employment.

The SIS (Social Integration Services) program is specifically designed to help adults acquire the necessary skills to be able to integrate and participate in society to their fullest potential. At the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), this program is offered for individuals with psychiatric disabilities, cerebral palsy, and to students with mild intellectual disabilities.

The SIS program helps students with intellectual handicaps or mental health issues. The main purpose is to give the students the skills they need to live in society. These skills are politeness, hygiene, punctuality, learning what is and is not appropriate. SIS aims at increasing students' auto-

my. It aims at maximizing the potential of all individuals and providing them with opportunities to integrate into society. Both the SVIS and SIS programs accept adults ages 18 and over, and at the EMSB there are three points of service: Marymount Adult Education Centre, Galileo Adult Education Centre and John F. Kennedy Adult Centre.

These programs are not exclusive to one school board. You can choose between boards to accommodate your demographic. The professionals that are helping you transition will guide you through this.

There is a future and we will help you get there.

Joanne Charron is the EMSB's parent commissioner for ACSES (Advisory Committee for Special Education Services), and special advisor to Inspirations.



By Steven Atme

Special People Have Dreams meets Kindness Campaign Tour

Throughout February of this year, I went on tour across Montreal with Rocco Speranza, a spiritual community animator with the English Montreal School Board (EMSB). We visited Gerald McShane, Edward Murphy, and East Hill Elementary Schools, and Vincent Massey Collegiate, to promote the EMSB Kindness Campaign and my *Special People Have Dreams* message.

We played the piano and sang songs, and experienced many heartwarming moments. It was wonderful meeting and interacting with the students. Many shared their dreams and inspirations. I asked students at every stop, "What is your dream?" One student at Gerald McShane responded: "My dream is to be happy." After the presentation, she

came to me and thanked me for coming and believing in her. Then, she cried and hugged me.

At Edward Murphy, I asked students what they were thinking about when I played the song *Where the Wind Blows* on the piano. One student said: "I was thinking about my brother who has autism. He gets picked on by bullies and has trouble understanding and speaking. I help him and we play games together. I love my brother very much."

At East Hill, there were kids waiting in line to play the piano. Some played on their own and some wanted me to teach them some songs.

It was wonderful to see students again at Vincent Massey who I had met two years ago when I visited East Hill during my first tour. One of the students plays the piano now. I was blown away by him and asked, "Where did you learn how to play?!" He replied,

"Actually, because of you. When you came to East Hill and played *Desert Flower*, you inspired me to never give up, follow my dream and play the piano."

It was the most wonderful tour of my life. Seeing students opening their minds, expressing themselves and sharing their talents and creativity speaks more than a thousand words. In the eyes of the students, I started to see hope, faith and their belief in themselves...in spite their differences.

Throughout the tour, I said, "Be kind to one another, be true to yourselves and share not only items with friends, family and teachers but also ideas, opinions, and work together as a team. If there's a problem with bullies,



Steven Atme visits with Mrs. Elena's Grade 3 class at East Hill Elementary School. (Photo credit, Rocco Speranza)

stand up and tell a teacher or your parents because we don't tolerate that kind of behaviour. Even though we're all different, one thing everyone has in common is a dream. Nobody can stop you from following your dreams.

You guys are all special to me, your families and your teachers. We believe in you! Go out there and reach for the stars!

École Yaldei welcomes more students with increased programs at new campus

By Wendy Singer

The Donald Berman Yaldei Developmental Centre is a hidden gem within the special needs community. Yaldei provides care and education to children with special needs, be it physical, cognitive or those who have autism. While located at the Queen Elizabeth Health Complex in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce there was a tremendous demand for services, and in turn, a need for more space.

Last fall, Yaldei moved into what was previously Jewish People's and Peretz School at 5170 Van Horne Avenue in Montreal. Their new home provides the luxury of bright, spacious treatment rooms and classrooms, a gym, and ample space to increase the repertoire of services.

The school recently received authorization from the Ministry of Education to include children with autism having an intellectual disability as well as those with moderate-

severe and profound needs. The school is free of charge as a private school in the public sector with specialized therapies and follows a Ministry of Education curriculum.

Once current renovations are completed, Yaldei will have a Snoezelen room, creative arts therapy space, an ABA department and specialized professional therapy rooms, all under one roof. "The school is a huge asset as we can continue to work with students providing special education and specialized therapy during the course of their day," said Joelle Bohadana, communications and marketing director at Yaldei.

Yaldei Developmental Center also has an Early Intervention Program dedicated to helping children of all backgrounds with developmental challenges reach their full potential. Their integration of advanced clinical, behavioural, educational and family support services provides children with the opportunity to learn how to walk, talk, play, attend school and lead productive lives as part of their community.

A visit to the new Yaldei campus is an opportunity to see this team in action and children thriving. According to Ben Baer, clinical director of Yaldei, the number of students at their school has tripled in the last two years. Students range in age from four to Cycle 1 of high school. The Developmental center treats children from infancy to young adults.

The Yaldei team prides itself on their child-focused and family-centered process of giving care and education. "Therapists, parents, teachers, and children collaborate as a team. We try to find what works and doesn't work. It's investigative," shared Baer. "Using play-based models, we introduce them to different environments and give them time and every opportunity to develop their own voices."

The school now has classes for students with autism spectrum disorder, and plans to implement after school activities, and programs for the 21 and over population.

Excited about what Yaldei will bring to families in the future, Baer adds: "The building is already small because we have such big plans."

For information about the Donald Berman Yaldei Development Centre, visit www.yaldei.org.



André (AJ) with teaching assistant Samantha Torkin. (Photo credit, Yaldei)



EMSB introduces Early Stimulation class

By Claudia De Luca and Courtney Sculnick

The EMSB is happy to announce the creation of the Early Stimulation class (ES), a new special education classroom program for students with special needs between the ages of four to six. The ES class started out as a pilot project last year at Parkdale Elementary School, and was most recently created at Dalkeith and Hampstead Schools in September 2016. The ES class is geared towards children with significant delays due to a known diagnosis (autism, Down syndrome, intellectual impairment, etc.) that require a more specialized program and environment than that of a regular pre-Kindergarten or Kindergarten classroom.

The ES class program provides a safe and engaging environment for students of all abilities and levels to learn and thrive. The teachers and childcare workers (CCW) provide a warm and nurturing environment for the students, where much positive reinforcement is provided to encourage and motivate them to feel successful. There is a maximum

of six students with one teacher and one CCW. Professionals from the Student Services department work in partnership with the teachers and CCWs in the classes, as well as the parents and professionals from the community to support the student's Individualized Education Plan (IEP).

Some of the main goals for the students are independence in daily living activities such as dressing, eating and self-care, and following general school day routines. The students learn to communicate needs, wants and make choices. Various modes of communication are explored in order to foster more effective communication skills.

The use of visual schedules, structured routines and small group instruction facilitate the students' learning and diminish anxiety that may occur in an otherwise larger classroom setting. Academic-based activities are geared toward the individual student's level of functioning with hands-on activities centered on multi-sensory learning experiences

and the use of various specialized teaching strategies. All of the students have an IEP, and teachers differentiate class material and lessons to satisfy the individual needs of each student.

In keeping true to the EMSB's philosophy of inclusion, the class' location within a regular school environment offers opportunities for students in the ES class to integrate with peers within regular classroom environments when considered appropriate. By offering a smaller class environment to support early learning and the opportunity to integrate and learn from appropriate peer models, students can better thrive in an inclusive educational environment.

Claudia De Luca is an occupational therapist, and Courtney Sculnick is a special education consultant with the English Montreal School Board.



Teacher Christina doing Mat Man, a teaching activity from Handwriting Without Tears, at Dalkeith Elementary School.



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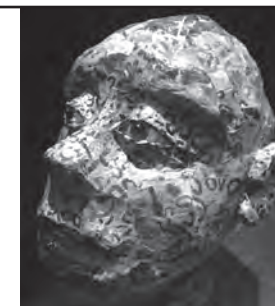
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Accessibility advocates rally to build a barrier-free Canada

By Randy Pinsky

Harvard lawyer David Lepofsky opened his talk on February 3, 2017, at Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom with, “Kids, I have the best job in the world; I get paid to argue.” An accomplished accessibility advocate and visually-impaired professor at the University of Toronto, Lepofsky was the Temple’s featured speaker for their Jewish Disabilities Awareness and Inclusion Month shabbaton.

Chair of the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act Alliance (AODA), Lepofsky has been at the forefront of critical legislation designed to reinforce that barriers to accessibility are in fact, transgressions against human rights. Under his stewardship, the Ontarians with Disabilities Act was implemented in 2001; one of his numerous wins in the fight for those with special needs.

Mainstream society rarely must consider whether they will be able to board a bus, fit

through a door, or safely enter a building. Such an experience, however, “is not the world we live in”. Lepofsky subsequently applauds Canada’s Minister of Sports and People with Disabilities, the Honourable Carla Qualtrough, for pushing forth legislation for a truly accessible Canada.

As it stands, the current system for change is a significantly slow and reactive one which Lepofsky describes as exhausting, expensive, and unfairly burdensome to those with disabilities. While measures for accessibility have improved since Lepofsky started his crusade, gaps remain, with successes emerging only from much effort. It took him 13 years of campaigning the Toronto Transit Commission to announce all transit stops. He ultimately won the case in 2007.

Even with greater awareness, challenges abound, illustrated by Lepofsky’s audit of Toronto’s Women’s College Hospital and Centennial College Culinary Arts School. While meeting all construction codes, he

deadpanned how the buildings bore “tons of accessibility blunders”. Examples included Braille signs indicating the washroom room number as opposed to gender, dangerous drop offs, and standard height parking meters in the wheelchair zone.

As social media has empowered all to be citizen journalists, he encourages individuals to publicize accessibility flaws with the cheeky hashtag, #AODAFail. Lepofsky believes that architects are simply not trained to incorporate such issues in their planning, making their exposure all the more necessary.

Moreover, with the population aging, Lepofsky quipped: “You’re either with us, or will soon be.”

In honor of his determination to create a barrier-free nation, Lepofsky was recognized as one of Canada’s most influential lawyers in the 2010 Canadian Lawyer Magazine. In response, he mused: “If I am so influential, why doesn’t anyone listen to me?”



Temple’s Inclusion Committee and community members. Front row from left to right: David Lepofsky, Rabbi Ellen Greenspan, Nancy Maklin, Cynthia Davis, Ilana Milgram, chair of Inclusion Committee, Cheryl Libman. Back row from left to right: Jim Owens, Chuck Hendrickson, Jonah Davis Yanofsky. (Photo courtesy of Cheryl Libman)



Passing on the joy of cooking

By Jay Jones-Doyle

It took me a very long time to appreciate the joys of cooking. For a variety of reasons I was not exactly enthusiastic about spending more time than required in the kitchen when I was younger, which resulted in a lot of time spent counting down the seconds on the microwave. When the tell-tale “Ding!” was heard, I would quickly grab the item of choice (leftovers, ramen, something with cheese oozing out of it...) and scurry back down into the depths of the basement to frantically gnaw at it like some creature of the night.

It was really only when my son Benjamin was born, or even a few years later, that I stopped to think about all of the arguments that my parents had with me in fruitless attempts to get me to cook on a regular basis. I decided then and there that I didn’t want to end up in the same pattern with Benjamin. I started learning to cook tasty, well-seasoned food so that when he was old enough I could introduce him to it. I wanted to encourage him to experiment with cook-

ing at an age where he was receptive and not rebellious.

I started by teaching him kitchen safety at age six, but I took a slightly different approach. Our first lesson was about knives, and that at some point he was going to cut himself. Instead of trying to protect him, I equipped him with both proper knife-use techniques and the knowledge of how to react when things don’t go according to plan. This removed the fear about using a sharp knife (which, for those who don’t know, is the safest knife in the kitchen; it’s most often the dull knives that slip and cause injuries). After understanding how to be safe he was able to move around the kitchen with confidence, which made the experience more appealing and welcoming.

By the time he was seven years old, Benjamin was a master of the fried-egg breakfast, a wiz at prepping veggies, and even made a really great ratatouille from scratch (inspired by the movie, of course). As the

years went on his interest waivered but the ability remained, and now at 12 years old he appears to be rekindling the fire. A very close friend, and one of the top chefs in Montreal, is opening a fine-dining restaurant on Monkland Avenue in N.D.G. (which will be called “Hopkins”). During the pre-opening menu testing phases Benjamin was invited to cook alongside the chefs. A few weeks ago he helped prepare braised octopus, butter-poached lobster, and rack of lamb. The chefs even bought him his own chef’s jacket! With the guidance of Chef Liam Hopkins, and Sous-Chef Carter Bourassa, I am certain that Benjamin’s love of great food and the culture of preparing it is in great hands and will only continue to blossom. I can’t thank them enough.

Jay Jones-Doyle is the co-founder and v.p. Product Development of Legal Lighthouse Inc. He is also the president of Confidence Driven Coaching, the chief financial officer of the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, and worked with the



Benjamin in the kitchen.

UN’s Business and Biodiversity program. He holds two advanced degrees and was named one of Quebec’s top three graduate students of 2011 and Concordia’s Outstanding Student of the Year. He sits on the Board of Directors of the Concordia University Alumni Association, is a motivational speaker, a championship-winning junior hockey coach, and has cerebral palsy.



Caroline's Cart makes shopping easier

By Elaine Cohen

The old saw “necessity is the mother of invention” proved true for Drew Ann Long, an enterprising mother of three in Alabama. By 2005, Long was determined to alleviate her constant struggle at the supermarket transferring her middle child, Caroline, five, from a wheelchair to a grocery cart, while attending to her two-year-old and holding onto the wheelchair. Moreover, Long realized Caroline was outgrowing the traditional shopping cart.

After a year of brainstorming, Long designed sketches, founded Parent Solution Group LLC, conferred with engineers, carried out due diligence, sought a manufacturer/distributor, plus pitched the mutual merchant/consumer advantages of acquiring the cart. Technibilt, a Wanzi company, in North Carolina, manufactures Caroline's

Cart. Cari-All, located in Montreal, is a Canadian distributor. Caroline's Cart has been available since 2013 in Canada. Today, it is distributed in the U.S.A., U.K., Europe and Canada. Numerous Walmart, Cosco, Target, pharmacies, supermarkets and other outlets have responded to requests and purchased it.

“Caroline has never said a word or taken a step but she's changing lives,” Long said, alluding to her daughter. The cart accommodates older children with autism spectrum disorder and individuals of all ages with mobility and other issues, Long points out.

Quebecers JoAnne Mosel, Stéphanie Leclerc, Audrey Rouleau and Johanne Gaudet remarked how Caroline's Cart has transformed what once was a dreaded chore into a productive excursion.

“At last count in December, 23 Quebec addresses have ordered a cart,” said Mosel, elated with the progress made since she began her search a couple of years ago. Last spring, Mosel tracked down a cart at Metro Plus Fleury, a half hour drive from her home in Outremont. “I knew the cart was in the U.S. but learned it was in Quebec through Facebook (Quebec Special Needs Family Support Group). Although she contacted Technibilt and Cari-All, she credits Leclerc and Rouleau in Quebec City for providing guidance. She recommends their Facebook page (Caroline's Cart au Québec) as well as their videos and media interviews for information.

(Continued on Page 14)



Provigo Saint-Lin personnel welcome Johanne Gaudet and her daughter, Emma. (Photo courtesy of Johanne Gaudet)

Miriam Foundation salutes Minister Charlebois for comprehensive Autism Action Plan

By Warren Greenstone

Representatives from the Miriam Foundation attended Minister Lucie Charlebois' press conference on March 21, 2017 where she released the government's long-awaited action plan for autism. The Miriam Foundation, which has been lobbying and advocating for better services for the 76,000 Quebecers living with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), salutes the government's Action Plan, its announcement of \$29 million recurring annually, and its \$1.25 million for research, which, all together, will allow tens of thousands of families to breathe a much-needed sigh of relief.

In December of 2016, the Miriam Foundation launched an online advocacy campaign, calling on Quebecers to send emails to Ministers. Over 15,000 emails found their way to these Ministers' inboxes, demanding recurring annual investments to clear waitlists for Early Intensive Behaviour Intervention (EIBI) therapy for children, and to clear the 10-plus-year waitlist for adults with ASD for residences. The Action Plan promises to

address the full spectrum of needs for people of all ages, and the Miriam Foundation would like to thank the thousands of individuals who sent emails and can take pride in knowing that their voices were heard by the government.

For the Chairperson of the Board at the Miriam Foundation, Diane Proulx Guertera, “This announcement is proof that if we are persistent and collaborative, the government will act. We are optimistic that this Action Plan will begin to address what people in the ASD community have been hoping for: that with the right services in place, people with ASD and their families can indeed lead more fulfilling lives. Let's not ever forget that ASD is a lifelong issue: it's not just children; tens of thousands of teenagers, adults, and the elderly all need greater support. For now, we believe the plan was worth the wait, but we'll be watching carefully to make sure it is implemented quickly, efficiently, and effectively.”

The plan is a great start, and many families will be relieved, but let's not forget that the

\$29 million announced will amount to less than \$400 per individual, and that there are inefficiencies in the current system that need to be addressed. Many other Canadian provinces have been responsive to the needs of people with autism and their families; as such, there is a real opportunity for the provincial government to ease the ongoing financial pressure felt by families touched by ASD and/or intellectual disabilities, by increasing direct financial support.

Warren Greenstone is the president and chief executive director of the Miriam Foundation.

For more information visit www.miriamfoundation.ca.



Minister Lucie Charlebois, Minister Gaétan Barrette, and Minister Sébastien Proulx at the press conference announcing Quebec's Autism Action Plan. (Photo credit, Miriam Foundation)



One-on-one with Senator Chantal Petitclerc

The former Paralympian sat down with Inspirations' Ottawa Bureau Chief Hayley Chazan to discuss everything from life as a newly appointed Senator, to championing important legislation, and to how she plans on honouring Canada as it celebrates its 150th anniversary.

CANADA 150

HC: *What do you like most about being a parliamentarian?*

CP: I was appointed just over a year ago and I feel very privileged to be here. My background is in Canadian History, so I've always been very passionate about our country and I'm so proud to call Parliament Hill my office.

Coming from the high performance sports environment, it's been a very steep learning curve. When I was an athlete, I had to focus solely on sports and training, so there



Senator Petitclerc accompanied by Aurélie Rivard, Paralympic medalist at the Rio Games, and Meaghan Benfeito, Olympic medalist at the Rio Games. (Photo credit, Mike Pinder Photography)



Senator Petitclerc's swearing in on April 12, 2016 with representatives of the government in the Senate, Senator Peter Harder and her sponsor, Senator Claudette Tardif. (Photo credit, Neil Valois Photography)

were opportunities to explore my other interests. As a parliamentarian, I've had the chance to learn about so many other things that I would never have had the opportunity to get to know. The list includes everything I care about from the budget to Senate modernization to legislation. I'm so passionate about my work and I'm confident that I can make a big impact.

HC: *How did your experience in high performance sports prepare you for this role?*

CP: Sport is such an amazing school in which to learn about yourself, because you're alone in front of your fears. You need to learn new skills, show up, have a good attitude and repeat those good habits in the face of adversity. A lot of who I am as a senator and how quickly I feel I've been able to adjust to this new environment comes from my sports career. Sure, maybe the topic or environment is different, but to achieve a goal, it's always the same path.

HC: *You're currently sponsoring Bill S-5, the Tobacco and Vaping Products Act. What has that been like?*

CP: Sponsoring a bill has been an amazing experience for me as a new Senator, because you get to champion legislation all the way from when it enters the Senate to

when it eventually becomes law. It's given me the opportunity to really be hands on and has helped speed up the learning curve. On top of that, I truly believe in this legislation. Tobacco kills 37,000 Canadians every year so this bill, which will regulate the vaping market, allows me to put my passion for health and my desire to protect Canadians together.

HC: *Why do you think it's important that we have an independent Senate?*

CP: I think that becoming a more modern and less partisan institution will help us go back to our roots and accomplish the job that we were intended to do, which has always been sober second thought. That means examining a bill and without any outside pressures, using our skills, competencies and expertise to make it the best it can be for Canadians. I also think an independent Senate will allow us to gain back the trust and respect of Canadians.

HC: *The government has committed to introducing accessibility legislation for persons with disabilities. Why do you think this is an important step?*

CP: As a country, we need to have legislation that embraces all different aspects of life and challenges for persons with dis-

abilities. Right now, we have many good initiatives, but we don't have that big global framework to serve as a tool for everything else. It's more than just protecting persons with disabilities. It's about making sure that they have the same opportunities that everyone else has and providing them with the conditions to succeed.

HC: *What are you most looking forward to this year as Canada turns 150?*

CP: We're so lucky that in Canada, we can be whoever we choose to be and do whatever we want to do. We take it for granted, but it's truly amazing. This year, more than ever, it's important that we take the time to recognize the level of diversity and tolerance that exists and celebrate our uniqueness.

Over the next 150 years, it is my hope that we become more ambitious and strive to be leaders when it comes to important issues like social and environmental change. I think we have the resources and the power to show the world that we can be a nation others can look up to. We need to demonstrate that we're not afraid to tackle the issues that really matter. The world needs a leader. Someone has to do it. Why not us?

This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.



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How to avoid burnout when raising a child with special needs

By Lori Rubin

I LOVE YOU BUT I'M LOSING IT!

Parents and guardians of children with special needs deserve the highest level of praise and admiration imaginable. Like all parents, they are “on-call” 24/7, but often have the added stress of raising children who don’t sleep, eat, play or do homework autonomously. In addition, there are often medical needs that have to be attended to, which may include administering medication, doing specialized exercises, taking them to and from numerous therapeutic appointments, and trying to arrange social engagements that are both stimulating and a good fit for their child. Most of the time, these tasks are carried out with tremendous love and devotion, more often than not with a big, brave smile on their face.

However, everyone has a limit, even those with a very high tolerance for stress. Too many sleepless nights, tantrums or power struggles, too many tasks and chores to take care of in a week, can transform a parent who has always been a warrior, to someone who becomes easily enraged or is reduced to tears. Add to this a parent who also works outside of the home, who may be ill, or undergoing financial or marital

strain, or experiencing the challenges of being a single parent, you have all the conditions in place for *parental burnout*.

This is a condition where, despite having the best of intentions to perform daily tasks in a responsible and effective manner, the parent finds themselves operating in a fog of disorganization and exhaustion, heightened sensitivity to their environment, and a general inability to carry out their parental obligations without breaking down or exhibiting frequent signs of stress. It is a debilitating and even dangerous place to be, often leading to bouts of depression, self-medication and in its most severe form, can even lead to thoughts or acts of self-harm or other dangerous behaviours.

The following is a non-exhaustive checklist of helpful strategies if you, or someone you know, is reaching the “tipping point” caring for a child with special needs:

- Use a lot of “self-talk” strategies, telling yourself that it won’t be this hard forever.
- Do not be afraid or embarrassed to ask for help! Call a family member, neigh-

bour, friend, or a rehabilitation centre (such as L’Intergral, Miriam Home, WIAIH) that your child may be attached to. Sometimes having even an hour break can make all the difference.

- Contact the various respite services in the Greater Montreal area. Many offer drop-off services to help parents/guardians through a difficult day, such as: Emergo Respite Services (514) 931-2882; Monkland Community Centre (514) 983-2349 or monklandspecialneeds.com.
- Look into one of the many specialty camps (day camps or residential camps) that offer summer programs for anywhere from one week to two months, allowing you to take a summer break.
- *Go easy on yourself!* Don’t strive for perfection. Recognize and honour the many strengths your child has, while at the same time choosing your battles

with the issues you feel compelled to address.

- **Most importantly**, listen to those around you who notice you are “not yourself”, or find that you are more short-tempered or anxious than usual. That’s the best time to act, ask for help, make alternative arrangements, and to give yourself a break.

Parents and guardians who care for children with special needs are among the most stressed parents in our society, but with the proper support, strategies and tools, they can avoid the all-too-common state of burn-out and continue to be the lifeline that their children so badly need.

Lori Rubin is a behaviour management specialist at the English Montreal School Board.

(Caroline’s Cart continued from Page 12)

Gaudet, a resident of Saint-Lin, is the mother of a five and a half-year-old with special needs. Emma is currently a happy shopper thanks to owners like the one at Provigo-Saint-Lin, who invested in Caroline’s Cart. Gaudet printed out information on the cart and left it at the store noting she would return to chat with the owner.

The other mothers also interacted with merchants pointing out the advantages of investing in a cart. Leclerc’s seven-year-old daughter, Sarah, who has Phelan-McDermid syndrome, and Rouleau’s 13-year-old son Zachary, who has Angelman syndrome, are content and comfortable in Caroline’s Cart.

Caroline’s Cart has an injection molded seat designed for older children and adults.

Unlike the conventional shopping cart, this one holds individuals that weigh from 35 to 250 pounds. The occupant faces the handler and is supported with an adjustable harness. A platform beneath the seat serves as a foot rest. The cart is equipped with handles that swing away allowing easy access and it’s easy to manoeuvre.

“We do our best to raise awareness about how the cart has changed our way to shop.” Rouleau explained. “Now, we can include our kids and it’s not as stressful.”

For information visit *Caroline’s Cart* (www.carolinescart.com), *Leclerc* and *Rouleau’s Facebook page* (*Caroline’s Cart au Québec*) and www.chariotdecaroline.weebly.com.



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Kaleb's wish is granted

By Eleni Giannakis

Kaleb is an eight-year-old boy who has Osteogenesis Imperfecta (OI), a complicated, rare, genetic bone disorder characterized by fragile bones that break easily. It is also known as 'brittle bone disease'. The term literally means "bone that is imperfectly made from the beginning of life." A person is born with OI and is affected throughout his or her lifetime. It can affect other body systems. Treatment can include medication, surgery, and rehabilitation.

Kaleb currently attends Pierre Elliot Trudeau, an elementary school within the English Montreal School Board. He has been a patient at the Shriners Hospital for Children - Canada since birth. His mother, Marie-Hélène Bedard, feels incredibly lucky to have the only Canadian Shriners Hospital so close by, which specializes in a wide range of pediatric orthopaedic and

neuromusculoskeletal conditions. It is an international research center for OI.

In a video presented by Make-A-Wish Québec, Kaleb compares his bones to swiss cheese, as though they have holes in them. His mother describes her son as an extremely courageous boy, and explains that he had experienced his 100th fracture by the time he was three years old. (The family stopped counting at that point).

Kaleb had a lofty dream to see the rainforest and visit all of the insects which he loves. Last year, to his great delight, he was granted his wish by Make-A-Wish Québec. This organization grants wishes to children that have life-threatening medical conditions with the intention of enriching their lives with hope, strength, and joy. Make-A-Wish Canada has currently granted over 6,000 wishes to children.

Make-A-Wish made Kaleb's dream come true during the 10th anniversary of the

48-HOUR RIDE, a fundraiser for Make-A-Wish Québec. An entomologist came to the event and showed Kaleb many different creatures, such as tarantulas and scorpions.

Bedard describes the moment they found out that Kaleb's wish had been granted as joyful. "This opportunity gave him the motivation to try new things and be more courageous," she shared.

Last December, Make-A-Wish sent Kaleb and his family to Costa Rica where they stayed at the Flamingo Beach Resort. "We are so grateful for everything Make-A-Wish did to accommodate Kaleb," said Bedard. "There was never a dull moment!"

Recalling their visit to the rainforest, Bedard said: "Kaleb had stars in his eyes."

To watch the video visit <https://goo.gl/j4gD2X>.



Kaleb and his brother Marcus-James in Costa Rica.
(Photo credit, Marie-Hélène Bedard)

Federal budget embraces individuals with special needs

The 2017 federal budget brings about changes that affect families caring for people with special needs. Here are some highlights to note for personal income tax measures.

By Harold Akerman

Disability tax credit – nurse practitioners

On or after March 22, 2017, nurse practitioners will be added to the list of medical practitioners that can certify eligibility for the disability tax credit for all types of impairments that are within the scope of their practice.

Consolidation of caregiver credits

Effective for 2017 and subsequent years, the existing caregiver credit, infirm dependent credit and family caregiver tax credit will be replaced with the Canada Caregiver Credit. The Canada Caregiver Credit will be reduced dollar for dollar by the dependant's net income above \$16,163 (in 2017).

The dependant will not be required to live with the caregiver in order for the caregiver to claim the new credit.

Tuition tax credit

The eligibility criteria for the tuition tax credit after 2016 will apply to fees for an individual's tuition paid to a university, college or other post-secondary institution in Canada for occupational skills courses that are not at the post-secondary level (e.g., training in a second language or in basic literacy and numeracy to improve job skills)

It will now include occupational skills courses such as computer programming that are undertaken at a post-secondary institution in Canada, and to allow the full amount of bursaries received for such courses to qualify for the scholarship exemption (where conditions are otherwise met).

Public transit tax credit

The public transit tax credit will be eliminated, effective July 1, 2017.

Please remember that the budget is not automatically approved as is. It must still be debated and approved prior to it becoming law. If you have issues with the 2017 budget, contact your Member of Parliament to voice your concern.

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My Hero Brother: Documenting a special Himalayan trek

By Randy Pinsky



Brothers Hannan (left) and Enosh Cassel, founder and producer of *My Hero Brother*. (Photo credit, *My Hero Brother*)

Setting: Young adults with Down syndrome (DS) on a two-week hiking trip with their siblings; Location: The Himalayan mountains; Mission: To reach the summit - together. Such is the essence of the award-winning documentary *My Hero Brother* by Israeli filmmaker Yonatan Nir.

Director of the 2011 acclaimed *Dolphin*

Boy, Nir has over a decade of experience telling stories. A former photojournalist, he confided missing the human aspect of crafting a story through film. He recognized the invitation to cover the hiking trip as a valuable opportunity to explore complex sibling relationships.

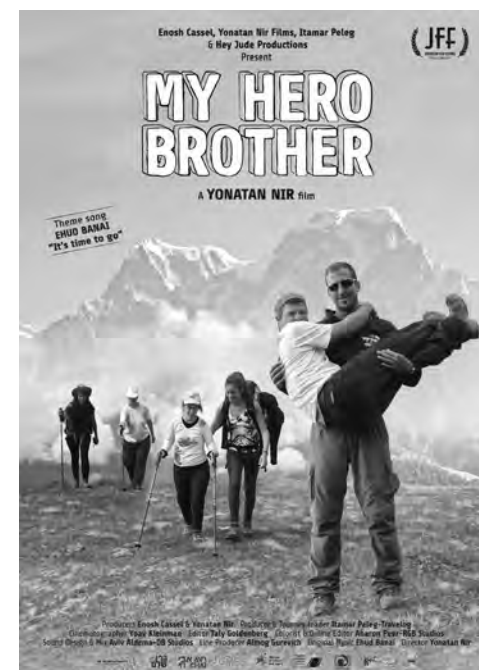
The documentary depicts the challenges and rewards of having special siblings, and the need to meet others who can empathize with their experiences. Directed with a blend of humour and introspection, the film recounts the mixed emotions, long overdue bonds formed, and lessons learned while caring for one another on their two-week trek. Siblings shared the need to put forth a confident front while suppressing insecurities. When one sibling suddenly burst out, "It's hard," another responded, "I know."

Viewers were intrigued to see that those with DS were central to resolving issues

due to their sensitivity to others' feelings. A particularly powerful instance occurred when one of the participants with DS had a bout of altitude sickness. While the 'neuro-typical' individuals conferred about what to do, a peer with DS played the harmonica for the patient. The magical scene ended as quickly as it started when he quietly smiled and walked away, his work done; the most connected he had been all journey.

My Hero Brother is a human and meaningful story that does not shy away from nor sugarcoat challenges, but effectively explores this journey of redemption in all its complexity. By the end, one questions to whom the 'hero' reference is directed.

There is much to learn from individuals with DS, best evoked by the phrase eloquently shared in *My Hero Brother*, "What are you doing today?"- "Today, I am happy."



SBDC shares stage with WIAIH

By Wendy Singer

The Sonia Balazovjech Dance Company (SBDC) sees dance as a form of expression and a powerful tool for raising awareness and funds for charitable organizations. For the last seven years, SBDC has partnered with various non-profit organizations that support education such as LOVE (Leave Out Violence), and 60 Million Girls. This year, SBDC chose WIAIH (West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped) as their partner and benefactor.

West-Islander Sonia Balazovjech, founder of SBDC, is a lifelong ballet dancer, former competitive gymnast, and kindergarten teacher at Sherbrooke Academy Junior of the Lester B. Pearson School Board. She leads this troupe of nine dancers, all who grew up on the West Island, work full-time, and have a passion to continue dancing and giving back to the communities that have given them so much.

This year's show *Perspectives* combined multidisciplinary contemporary dance with



SBDC dancers with WIAIH member Arlica Phagu and WIAIH preschool educators (back row). (Photo credit, Josiane Farand)

raw storytelling, lush soundscapes and captivating visual effects. It all came together in an honest narrative about the realities of individuals living with intellectual disabilities or autism, and their families.

In preparation for the show, Balazovjech, some dancers, and technical director Robert Lynch visited WIAIH members and their families to hear their stories. Video montages of these interviews prepared by Lynch were shared with the audience prior to each dance.

Executive director of WIAIH Natalie

Chapman explained that WIAIH members were proud to be involved in this collaborative process. "By being interviewed and asked their thoughts and opinions, they felt recognized. It's very affirming and boosted their self-esteem."

Through intentional choreography, *Perspectives* explored parenting, sisterhood, adulthood, barriers and frustrations, art, and partnership. "The topic of special needs can be touchy. It can be presented all wrong. It was important to me to not use labels. The bottom line is it's just about people, and families," shared Balazovjech.

In a two-part number called *Fitting In* dancers tackled the difficult issues that school-aged children face being excluded due to differences. In the second part, WIAIH member, hip hop lover and Summit School graduate Arlica Phagu, who choreographed the dance, shared the stage with the troupe.

The SBDC team's pride while dancing with 21-year-old Phagu was off the charts. "It was a powerful performance. The dancers were dancing with their hearts and not just their bodies," shared Phagu's foster parent



Lauren Mallais-DeLuca, Arlica Phagu, and Sonia Balazovjech perform during the SBDC's *Perspectives* show. (Photo credit, Josiane Farand)

Terrie Bélanger Ardron.

"The show has left us with a lasting impression. The thoughts expressed delivered a powerful message, giving the audience a deep understanding of the realities that WIAIH families are faced with on a daily basis," said Franca Kesic, coordinator of community and volunteer relations at WIAIH.

The event included an efficient team of volunteers, many from MacDonald High School, who mentored WIAIH members at front of house and back stage, making this a truly inclusive event.

For information visit www.wiaih.qc.ca, or www.sbdcmil.com.



Les Grands Ballets is on point with adapted classes

By Russ Cooper MSc. OT

Since January, Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal has been offering ballet classes specifically adapted for people with Down syndrome.

“We want to give them the opportunity to dance together and to build relationships,” says Christian Sénéchal, director for the National Centre for Dance Therapy at Les Grands Ballets Canadiens.

The program is a pilot project in response to rising demand from parents and teachers to increase the Centre’s creative programming for those living with disabilities.

In spring 2016, Sénéchal was approached by Sue Brotherhood, a dance teacher and occupational therapist. Collaborating with ballet teacher Tracey Schwartz and two dance movement therapists, the moment was right and the class was established.

The class’ 10 students, aged seven to 35, are experiencing an approach tailored to their specific abilities in relation to their condi-

tion that provides the support, guidance, and encouragement to be free to dance without limitations.

“This population loves to dance, but they reach a stage in regular dance classes where they fall a few steps behind and have difficulty keeping up,” says Sénéchal. Even so, while they might approach learning at their own pace, the focus is always on their ability and enjoyment of dance.

“There’s no ceiling for ability amongst themselves,” says Brotherhood.

“I like this class because I’m trying something new,” says Matthew Brotherhood, Sue’s 31-year-old son, who is living with Down syndrome. “I like meeting new people and going to new places.”

While enjoyment is key, the hope behind this initiative is to foster passion and further the ability to increase the students’ capacity for movement beyond dance. Potentially, they might develop the ability to integrate into more advanced dance classes in the future.

Sénéchal hopes to expand the program to include classes for those living with other conditions such as Parkinson’s or autism. This will take place in June when Les Grands Ballets moves to its new location in the Edifice Wilder Espace Danse next to Place des Arts where they will have seven dance studios, increased from three in their current Plateau location.

A formal show for this winter’s program is not planned, but Sue Brotherhood says the group has expressed interest in the possibility of a future performance. “They want to shine in what they do,” she says.

To get involved as a volunteer or as a participant, contact Amy Éloïse Mailloux at



Dancers enjoy their adapted class with Les Grands Ballet Canadiens de Montréal. (Photo credit, Patrick Pleau, Les Grands Ballets)

dansetherapie@grandsballets.com.

Russ Cooper is a Montreal-based occupational therapist. Previous to this, Russ served as a journalist and writer for 14 years.

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Mental fitness tip: Unplug!

By Despina Vassiliou, Ph.D. and Janet Perlis, M.A.

We know that exercise and eating right is good for our physical health, but what about our mental health? We are beginning a new series in Inspirations that will provide simple tips to help parents and children improve their mental health.

Mental health is our state of well-being. It allows us to cope with the stresses life throws at us, be productive in work or school, and have supportive relationships with friends and family. However, just as our physical health can fluctuate, so can our mental health. Therefore, we need to find strategies to balance our stress with self-care.

An important strategy to accomplish this goal is to unplug from technology a little every day. The majority of us, whether adult or child, can become extremely attached to our smart phones. There can be a cost to that.

As parents, we often complain about how much our children are hooked on technology. But if we really looked at ourselves and what we are modeling, we are not any different. The truth is that smart phones are very versatile and can make our lives much easier (e.g., managing our appointments, our interactions with others via social media, or work via email). However, there is a price to pay for this convenience. It is important to find times when we can

totally disconnect from our electronics and be present and in the moment.

Hence, our first mental fitness tip in this series:

Take 20 minutes a day to consciously unplug from technology

Fill these 20 minutes with either social or physical interactions. Social interactions may involve engaging in an enjoyable activity with your child such as playing a game (e.g., board game, card game, hide and go seek) or simply taking the opportunity to chat about your day. Physical activities may include taking a walk or a run, either alone or with your child, but without being plugged into your phone or iPod.

In these moments take the time to just notice everything around you. What do you see, hear, and feel? Do you hear birds, feel the sunshine on your skin, and/or the breeze? Once the 20-minute 'unplugged time' has been mastered, slowly increase the interval.

As we all develop a greater awareness of our environment, we become more attuned to what is occurring around us and how we are affected. Ultimately balancing our time with technology is one powerful strategy to help us strengthen our coping skills.

Stay tuned for tip #2 in the next edition of Inspirations.

Despina Vassiliou and Janet Perlis are psychologists with the English Montreal School Board.

Siblings are special, too

By Randy Pinsky

"I am the person I am today because of my brother," stated Meital Kraut, sporting a Friendship Circle Walk shirt with 'Do Amazing Things' on the front. A co-animator at the Friendship Circle (FC), Kraut spoke at FC's inaugural program for siblings of children with special needs on February 5 at Tan Tan Kat's colorful soap-making workshop. This was the ideal setting for what many believe is a long overdue initiative.

It can be challenging to be the neuro-typical and able-bodied sibling. Vying for parental attention, they are often expected to mature quicker, take on more responsibilities, and above all, be 'understanding' of the situation. As the volley of conflicting emotions can be complex, Kraut and co-facilitator Vanessa Ezerzer, both siblings of special brothers, were well-suited to lead this event.

Ezerzer, a student in Pure and Applied Science at Dawson College, recalls going through a range of confusing feelings. While her perspective has changed over time, she acknowledges the legitimate emotions many believe they must suppress.

It is not often that siblings of special brothers or sisters have the opportunity to meet one another. This was a valuable opportunity to connect with others who could truly empathize. Kraut, a psychology student at McGill University, values this chance to help create a support network. In sharing their experiences, the leaders effectively validated feelings the siblings may not yet be able to fully articulate.

Racheli Edelkopf, Family Support and Program developer, noted how many siblings experience the internal conflict of "am I not special too?" but may not know how to reconcile it. To build on this theme, the group engaged in an interactive exercise prompting discussion about their relationship with their special siblings.

While some participants chose to keep their reflections private, others were eager to share. One shyly noted how her brother "always listens so I can show him things," and wished for him "to grow up smart and happy and always love me." Another quipped, "my brother is lucky to have me because I am the best brother ever," reinforcing how these were really just siblings at the core. Ezerzer quietly concluded how grateful she was that her brother enabled her to see the



Sisters Zoe and Eliza Chilton. (Photo credit, Fani Nikopoulos)

world through his eyes, and wished "people could be as caring and loving as him."

As the room buzzed with soap-making, headway was made where the siblings began to realize that they are special, too.

For more information visit www.friendshipcircle.ca.

Randy Pinsky is a freelance writer for Inspirations, and coordinator of Team Inspirations for the Scotia Bank Charity Challenge.



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Resource Page

By Randy Pinsky

Peter Hall School's 'gateways' to success

Once youth with intellectual or developmental disorders 'age-out' of the school system, what options are available to them? How can they best become contributing members of society, and potentially, autonomous adults?

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Summit is unique in its educational philosophy where programs are developed by "observing and listening to the needs of the students". The work stages are yet another means of "Awakening the Potential" in all who enter their doors.

For information contact Barbara at (514) 744-2867 #239 or brichard@summit-school.com on Mondays and Fridays, or (514) 933-4464 on the other week days.



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"Promot[ing] quality learning" is the mission of the Endeavour Program, part of the Place Cartier Adult Education Centre of the Lester B. Pearson School Board for those with intellectual disabilities. By adapting the learning process to individual student needs, abilities, and interests, teachers and support staff create a dynamic learning environment where all can succeed.

As a social integration-based special education program, Endeavour staff motivate students to become "life-long learners" in a variety of fields. The over 200 students are continually challenged with learning applicable problem-solving and daily living skills, as well as academics, creative art therapies, and vocational training.

From recycling projects to stages with Canada Post and creative outlets such as jewelry-making, furniture restoration, and gardening, students feel empowered and engaged to their fullest potential. Endeavour is truly unique in its focus on "nurtur[ing] curiosity" by placing the individual at the center of their initiatives, helping them grow and develop on a cognitive, emotional and social level.

For information contact Myriam Rabbat at mrabbat@lbpsb.qc.ca, 514-694-8500, or visit www.lbpce.ca/Adult-Education/Special-Needs-Programs.



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Moisson Montreal: Fuels bodies and empowers minds

By Elaine Cohen

From outside, the spacious structure at 6880 chemin de la Côte-de-Liesse resembles other commercial edifices in the area, but the building that houses Canada's largest charitable food bank is unique. Established three decades ago, Moisson Montreal has evolved into an awesome network that distributes \$81.5 thousand worth of food to some 250-member non-profit organizations plus responds to over 658,256 monthly requests. The accredited charities receive all food and related products free. In return, they are asked to volunteer.

There is no food shortage in Canada but distribution is a challenge we must address, observed Terry Tierney, CEO of Daiya, alluding to Moisson Montreal's integral role.

Moisson Montreal is a member of the Food Banks of Quebec network (FBQ) and has the required infrastructure as well as the mandate to share foodstuffs received via this network. Through Moisson Montreal's liaison with supermarkets, agrifood donors and suppliers, the organization has been able to add fresh produce to its ever-growing list. Moisson Montreal maximizes the value of received food, reduces waste, fuels hungry bodies and satisfies needy souls.



"We need at least 50 volunteers a day throughout the year," says Irina, coordinator of volunteers, who came aboard in 2012 and assumed her current position in 2014. Moisson Montreal's administrative costs (1.3 percent) are among the lowest in Canada. Practically, 98 percent of donations are directed toward distribution to organizations. The Côte de Liesse headquarters is open from 8 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday; 8 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Friday. Volunteers who work full days receive a free lunch and a snack.

The volunteer contingent consists of banks, government agencies and corporate groups, students completing stages, adults preparing to return to work and seniors transitioning into retirement. Students and young adults with special needs from Summit T.E.C.C., Giant Steps School, CRDI TED, École Évangéline, and the Miriam Home

make up more than 50 percent of this volunteer cadre.

"The most gratifying part of my job is working with student groups and young adults with special needs," Irina related with a gleam in her eye. "They are among our most motivated volunteers." She praises teachers and animators that prepare groups to take pride in their contribution to Moisson Montreal. "These teachers are so dedicated. They tell us their students love what they are doing. We rely on the teachers' guidance." The students may be involved sorting bread, placing labels on products, assembling racks and other tasks.

The special needs network derives multiple benefits. They gain self-esteem, develop socialization skills, respect the routine and learn to adapt to a work environment. Some continue to volunteer long after they gradu-



Coordinator of volunteers Irina, Jonathan Grant, 20, a student at Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys' École du SAS (centre), and Karl-Michel Cyrius, technical social worker at Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys working in the Moisson Montreal warehouse.

ate, Irina observes. They welcome a place to go, where their productivity is appreciated.

Groups of students under the supervision of an educator must be at least 14 years old and able to stand while lifting items weighing five to seven kilos. Teens, under 16, volunteering independently need be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

For information, contact Irina at (514) 344-4494, ext. 253 or visit the website at www.moissonmontreal.org.

JEM Workshop: Packaging with a purpose

By Cindy Davis

Every weekday morning for the past 15 years, Heath Wald has been picked up by Transport Adapté to head off to his job at JEM Workshop. There, along with more than 80 other workers with various intellectual, emotional or physical disabilities, Wald provides packaging services for the more than 65 companies that hire JEM Workshop for their packaging needs. Wald has mild cerebral palsy and some physical limitations that make more traditional work environments difficult for him.

"I like labeling and packaging," says Wald. "I love them there (the supervisory staff

and social counselors at JEM). They're very good to me. They help me with a lot of things."

JEM Workshop has been providing an adapted workplace for adults with special needs since its founding in 1950. Located in a large and bright warehouse on Mountain Sights Avenue, the space also offers a large lunchroom, an activities centre and a computer room. Workers are offered a vast array of programming and activities during their lunch break, and a team of social counselors and staff ensure that the workers' needs are met in a way that cannot be offered in a traditional workplace.



Heath Wald and Danny Kay at JEM Workshops.

(Continued on Page 38)



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« Favoriser une meilleure qualité de vie pour l'ensemble de nos citoyens est une préoccupation constante pour moi et mon administration et c'est pourquoi nous avons adopté une Politique municipale d'accessibilité universelle pour créer un environnement inclusif pour tous. Considérer les personnes ayant une limitation fonctionnelle, reconnaître leur apport personnel et leur contribution au développement de notre communauté est le reflet d'un respect des différences et met l'emphase sur les capacités et le potentiel de chacun et assure leur pleine participation dans leur communauté. »
- Le maire Denis Coderre



Le maire Denis Coderre a reçu un accueil chaleureux de la part des représentants de la CSEM à l'occasion de la Soirée d'appréciation des bénévoles 2017 de la CSEM.
(Photo courtoisie du studio Green Apple)

Jeunesse au soleil, une organisation sur laquelle on peut compter

Par Emmanuelle Assor

Fondé en 1954, Jeunesse au soleil est une organisation bien ancrée dans sa communauté et l'étendue de son action n'a fait que croître et embellir avec le temps. Réputée comme organisation qui répond aux besoins d'urgence des familles, elle a déployé ses ailes bien au-delà de son mandat initial auprès des jeunes du quartier. En plus d'offrir de l'aide alimentaire et vestimentaire à toute personne dans le besoin - plus de 2 500 familles sont desservies par mois - l'organisation propose des programmes de sports et loisirs aux jeunes, des camps de jour, des programmes de prévention du crime, d'aide aux sinistrés, de services à domicile pour personnes à mobilité réduite, pour n'en nommer que quelques uns.

Fait moins connu, l'organisation reçoit et encadre dans différents programmes des personnes ayant des besoins spéciaux. Ouvert sept jours sur sept, l'organisation fonc-

tionne avec une soixantaine d'employés et autant de bénévoles! Au nombre de ceux-ci, plusieurs jeunes vivant avec une déficience intellectuelle aident ponctuellement l'organisation dans ses activités de dépannage alimentaire et vestimentaire. Tous les jours, une quarantaine de bénévoles aux besoins spéciaux aident au tri et à l'organisation des vêtements donnés par des particuliers. L'organisation accueille aussi des stagiaires et cette année quatre stagiaires aux besoins spéciaux ont été chaleureusement reçus par l'organisation. Ceux-ci ont été référés par des écoles spécialisées du réseau de la Commission scolaire de Montréal ainsi que par leurs intervenants des centres de réadaptation CRDI-TED.

De plus, des stages individuels sont organisés et les participants, tant filles que garçons, ont des profils variés. Dans le cadre de ces stages, les jeunes ont tous des objectifs différents mais un but commun : celui de s'intégrer dans un vrai milieu de travail. Selon les personnes responsables des stages, les intégrations sont très

réussies. Un stagiaire vivant avec une déficience intellectuelle a été engagé il y a plusieurs années et il s'occupe de la réception des marchandises, ce qui se passe très bien.

Au service à la clientèle, Buzo (qui est atteint de paralysie cérébrale et a 21 ans) reçoit et accompagne les familles démunies. Au premier contact, certaines personnes sont surprises que Buzo puisse les aider malgré son handicap. Le choc initial passé, les gens découvrent des personnes fantastiques et lumineuses qu'ils n'auraient pas rencontré autrement.

Selon Ann St-Arnaud, responsable des communications pour l'organisation : «Il faut des milieux de stage pour les personnes aux besoins spéciaux et à l'heure actuelle il n'y en a pas assez. Pour vraiment aider la communauté, il faut fournir un bon milieu de travail, accueillant et compréhensif pour tous» conclue-t-elle.



Buzo, un stagiaire à Jeunesse au Soleil, accueille les familles dans le besoin à son bureau. (Crédit photo, Jeunesse au Soleil)

Pour en savoir plus et pour s'impliquer:
<http://sunyouthorg.com/fr>

Emmanuelle Assor est une journaliste particulièrement touchée par la cause des enfants aux besoins spéciaux, étant elle-même la mère d'un garçon ayant un TSA.



De fil en aiguille avec l'Atelier le Fil d'Ariane

Par Gaétan Gagné

Fondé en 1971, L'Atelier le Fil d'Ariane inc. permet par des activités d'expression par l'art de sensibiliser le public aux possibilités artistiques des personnes vivant avec une déficience intellectuelle ou un trouble du spectre de l'autisme. L'expression par l'art permet également à nos artisans de développer leur potentiel créatif, de participer à la vie artistique tout en perpétuant un métier artisanal et traditionnel.

Notre programme diversifié offre à nos artisans l'opportunité de développer leur autonomie personnelle et professionnelle. Le travail de la broderie permet aux artisans de se définir comme artiste et d'assumer un rôle de citoyen actif dans notre société.

Quotidiennement, les artisans sont invités à développer et parfaire leurs compétences au travail de la broderie. Pendant les périodes allouées au travail de la broderie, les nouveaux artisans et les plus expérimentés

peuvent poursuivre leur apprentissage des multiples techniques de la broderie d'art.

Les usagers qui participent au programme de l'Atelier le Fil d'Ariane, ont l'opportunité de participer ponctuellement à certains projets spéciaux. La création de cartes fait main, le point noué, la fabrication de fleurs sont parmi les projets proposés. Ils peuvent aussi expérimenter le dessin et la broderie sur des petits sacs de jute, la création et la fabrication de poupées, de bas de Noël. Le tricot fait aussi partie de ces projets. Ainsi, quelques artisanes tricotent des foulards ou écharpes.

L'Atelier le Fil d'Ariane offre aussi des ateliers de peinture, un moment de liberté durant lequel les participants ont l'occasion de laisser libre court à leur imagination. De nombreux thèmes sont abordés à partir d'images d'inspiration, de quelques esquisses afin de développer la créativité des participants. Diverses techniques sont également apprises. Certains participants se dirigent vers des traits fins, d'autres

gras, les uns apprécient le pastel, les autres l'éponge... Petit à petit, chaque artiste développe sa voie et son cheminement individuel collant à sa personnalité.

De plus, depuis plusieurs années, l'Atelier le Fil d'Ariane a convenu d'une entente de partenariat avec la Commission Scolaire de Montréal pour les services d'une enseignante spécialisée deux jours par semaine.

De nombreux volets sont explorés avec les participants dans le but de développer la responsabilisation, l'autonomie et la créativité. Également, pour favoriser le développement culturel des artisans, des sorties sont organisées comme les visites dans les musées, l'accueil du musée à l'atelier, les sorties au théâtre, au Jardin botanique, etc.

Chaque semaine, un atelier de gestion des émotions est proposé aux participants. De façon volontaire, les artisans sont invités à participer à cet atelier en partageant des situations de leur quotidien. Ce moment privilégié permet aux artisans d'être accompagnés dans la résolution de problèmes lors de



Kenza Deschênes-Kherchi utilise la technique d'acrylique sur toile pour la création de son oeuvre intitulée: "La baleine dorée." (Crédit photo, l'Atelier le Fil d'Ariane inc.)

situations parfois conflictuelles présentes dans leur vie personnelle ou à l'atelier.

Pour plus de renseignements, visitez atelierlefilariane.org.

Gaétan Gagné est le directeur général de l'Atelier le Fil d'Ariane inc.

Femmes Asperger : des destins uniques mais un chemin commun

Par Emmanuelle Assor

En 2014, le groupe Femmes Asperger a vu le jour. Cinq femmes ayant en commun le fait de se reconnaître en tant qu'Asperger (autiste au fonctionnement de «haut niveau») ont décidé de joindre leurs énergies pour présenter des conférences sur le sujet.

Ces cinq femmes ce sont Marie Josée Cordeau, Lucilla Guerrero, Patricia Duguay, Kenza Deschênes-Kherchi et Marie Lauzon. Outre leur diagnostic, elles ont en commun le désir de renseigner le grand public sur ce qu'est l'autisme et, plus en particulier, sur leur réalité de femmes Asperger.

La première conférence de Femmes Asperger a eu lieu à Saint-Lambert en 2014, puis une autre s'est déroulée au Salon de l'autisme à l'automne 2015 et en avril 2017, puis au Centre Gold en mars 2016. L'idée de départ est venue de Kenza, fondatrice du groupe, qui voulait s'inspirer des conférences de Temple Grandin, une référence en autisme aux États-Unis et à travers le monde.

Le concept des conférences était simple : chaque femme exposait son point de vue sur une thématique touchant les femmes Asperger tout en parlant de son parcours unique. Ainsi, nos cinq conférencières ont abordé des questions très importantes pour elles, en parlant du cheminement en tant qu'artiste (Kenza); des difficultés vécues par les femmes Asperger dans leur vie sociale (Marie Josée); d'être mère en tant que femme autiste (Lucilla); des particularités d'un profil sensoriel (Patricia), et d'avoir des intérêts particuliers comme être passionnée par les voyages (Marie), ce qui est moins courant pour un profil Asperger féminin.

Au cours de ces conférences qui ont même intéressé des hommes Asperger, les participantes ont exposé quelques caractéristiques des femmes Asperger : leur façon de parler sans filtre, d'être vraies et incapables d'hypocrisie. Elles ont aussi abordé la question du travail, comme quoi autisme et vie professionnelle sont compatibles!

Dans ce groupe, toutes travaillent : Patricia est éducatrice spécialisée, Lucilla est artiste, Kenza confectionne des bijoux, Marie Josée est fonctionnaire dans le milieu scolaire et

Marie Lauzon est traductrice. Non pas sans défis quotidiens! Mais leur message est clair : il faut démythifier le profil féminin Asperger et voir tout le potentiel qui réside en chacune. Marie Josée ajoute « qu'au-delà de certaines difficultés sociales, on est capables d'accomplissements comme de donner des conférences devant des salles comblées! ».

Pour plus de renseignements sur les futures activités du groupe, consultez leur site web : <http://femmesasperger.com>.



Le groupe Femmes Asperger est composé de Lucilla Guerrero, Marie Josée Cordeau, Kenza Deschênes-Kherchi, Patricia Duguay et Marie Lauzon.

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Art therapy helps children express themselves

By Noriko Baba

Art is vital for the development of all children, particularly those with special needs. Art therapy is widely used in various settings such as schools, hospitals, and private practices. The creative process is a unique tool for students with special needs. Provided in a safe space, students feel a sense of support while interacting with others and sharing their stories through the art-making process.

Every week, two group art therapy sessions are conducted for students at L.I.N.K.S High School of the English Montreal School Board as part of their Creative Arts Therapies After School Program. Many positive effects are seen, including language and communication with peers.

Art therapists help children express their feelings in a multitude of ways, such as drawing a picture and then talking about the image, choosing cut-out picture pieces to make a collage, or selecting colours to draw shapes and lines.

Art materials can be varied: paint, pastels, markers, clay, fabrics, recycled material, natural objects (leaves, flowers, etc), and more. Having a choice of art

material, colour, shape, size as well as using chosen symbols and iconic figures in their artwork enables children to foster self-expression while promoting self-esteem and enhancing a sense of autonomy.

For a child with special needs, exploring art with an art therapist's assistance can promote his/her attention span, relaxation, and a sense of achievement. It can assist them in communicating their thoughts and expressing their emotions,



Student at L.I.N.K.S. High School participating in art therapy.
(Photo credit, Sharon Scimecca)

which can often be challenging through speech or writing. Through a playful and creative process, art therapy can increase a child's awareness of the world around them, others, and themselves.

No artistic talent is needed. Art therapists guide children to build a wide variety of skills: for example, fine motor, cognitive and communication skills. The diverse sensory experiences of art-making are enjoyable, and they help increase confidence and improve the student's overall psychological and physical well-being. Those who have trouble expressing themselves in words can experience a sense of joy, fulfill-

ment, and accomplishment by creating art without verbal expression.

Noriko Baba B.F.A, M.A is a professional art Therapist working at L.I.N.K.S, High School, EMSB, facilitating group art therapy sessions for students with learning difficulties, intellectual disabilities and special needs. She has a private art therapy practice, which includes counselling and home visits to children with autism and special needs, dyad sessions, and sessions for siblings. For information, contact Noriko at (514) 294-1773 or norikoarttherapy@gmail.com.

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PianoArt makes a noted impact

By Rady Almadany

When presented through special education and therapy, music offers people with autism great opportunities to focus, for social interaction, to gain self-control, body movement, and to work on behavioural and psychological problems.

The adapted and specialized piano lessons offered by PianoArt aims to provide people with autism instruction in a trusting environment where the professor-therapist is able to work on focus, socializing, kinaesthetic, behavioural and psychological issues. Many children with autism are able to focus their attention, work on self-control and social interaction while playing the piano, showing that music has an important impact on both clinical and artistic levels.

PianoArt offers Listening Therapy, created by the world famous Tomatis method. This method was created by French physician (ENT) Alfred Tomatis and it has gained great success in Europe and the rest of the world. It consists of listening to the music of Mozart with a special sound frequency program in order to stimulate the auditory system and the brain. The association of this method with yoga, music and art therapy and breathing techniques has brought excellent results in the area of attention, communication, motor skills, language and psychosocial maturity levels. There are several musical and clinical evaluations before and after the therapy is provided.

PianoArt demonstrated concrete results with an end of year concert where many students were able to perform on musical, clinical and social levels. PianoArt welcomes all students with autism regardless

of their clinical or artistic levels. Many of their students are non-verbal and struggle at school, but all of them have shown great success in their piano playing!

Rady Almadany MD, MT, DESS, ENP (Piano) is the professor and therapist at PianoArt. For information visit rady4433.wixsite.com/pianoart.

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Kouleinu Yachad: We all belong

By Atie Waxman

The Marlene and Joel King Special Needs Department at the Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA's goal is to provide a safe, welcoming and stimulating environment for leisure and recreational activities tailored to meet the individual needs of each participant. There are no criteria for accessing the department, making the programs unique in a city where many often feel excluded from programs based on diagnostic criteria or assessment results.

The Y embraces the value of inclusion. In addition to specific programs designed for individuals with special needs, regardless of age, they also facilitate their integration into all areas of the Y through the Kouleinu Yachad 'buddy' program. The program is based on the ideal that recreation is for everyone, and that everyone belongs at the Y. Participants access the fitness centre, language courses, and sports teams while maintaining a connection to the support that they may need. "Inclusion is what we do,"

said Lisa Friedman, education director at Temple Beth-El in Central New York. "It's the attitude we have. It is the way we treat others and the way they treat us. Inclusion is the opportunity to learn together and from one another...Inclusion is a MINDSET."

Carly Berlin, director of Youth and Family Engagement states: "It is one thing to meet the needs of your members, and it is another to search out future needs and to create programming that evolves with time."

Julie Longval, coordinator of the Special Needs Department, explains that all the programs were formally evaluated recently to meet the changing needs of the clientele. "With the funds raised through the Y Cycle for Special Needs, we were able to make these changes a reality."

Lego Building & Sensory Art is run in collaboration with FREE 2 B U KIDS, and provides participants with opportunities to develop their creativity and social skills. Additionally, a Multimedia Club for teens and

young adults serves as a powerful tool for creativity and a new means for self-expression. The staff continues to develop support networks for families and caregivers through the Family Outreach Program.

Each summer YCC Day Camps offer children the opportunity to experience day camp in an inclusive setting and the Harry Bronfman Y Country Camp hosts a four-day Special Needs Family Camp. This camp provides children with developmental disorders and/or learning disorders, their parents, and their siblings with the unique opportunity to experience the magic of summer camp in a warm, welcoming environment, building friendships and camp memories that will last a lifetime. Each day includes separate activity options for the campers, their siblings, and their parents, and group programming for the entire family. The Y also offers a Speech and Occupational Therapy



YCC Tikvah Special Needs Family Camp.
(Photo credit, Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA)

program in partnership with the Agence Ometz Small Steps program.

Atie Waxman is the director of Communications-Marketing at the Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA.

WordQ+SpeakQ helps young writers

By Susan Waite

Getting ideas down on paper can be difficult and frustrating for many young writers. Spelling challenges, in particular, can hinder the process. Fear of making errors can cause some students to avoid writing altogether. WordQ+SpeakQ to the rescue!

WordQ is a word prediction software that allows students to express themselves in writing with greater flow and ease. It works in a variety of writing applications. As the student writes, WordQ predicts the word he is attempting to spell. A floating word box containing a list of suggested words is presented on the screen. An inbuilt thesaurus and usage examples are also provided, in case the student needs more information before choosing the desired word. The student selects the target word from the list to insert into his text.

WordQ generates the word list from the letters the student has typed and contextual clues provided by the other words in the sentence. The more the student uses the

software, the more accurate WordQ's predictions become.

The program offers "speech feedback," which allows the student to listen to each word in the box prior to making his selection. The student may also use the speech feedback feature to listen to each word and sentence as he writes, or whole paragraphs or essays to facilitate proofreading.

The software also offers a text-to-speech function. Using this function, students may listen to digital text, including material on the internet. All WordQ features may be turned on and off as needed or preferred.

SpeakQ is a speech recognition software that works with WordQ. It offers a dictation (speak-to-write) feature for those students who need additional support with their spelling and writing. It may be used continuously or discretely as a dictation tool, as needed. Students using WordQ+SpeakQ are typically equipped with a headset with a built-in microphone. A set-up process must be undertaken to configure the microphone and the software to the student's voice and

speech patterns. As with the other features, SpeakQ may be turned on or off, as desired.

SpeakQ is particularly useful for discrete dictation of longer words or subject-specific vocabulary. The student stops typing, clicks on the microphone icon in the menu box, then speaks the desired word into the microphone. The software will present the dictated word(s) in the word prediction box for verification and selection.

WordQ+SpeakQ is simple-to-use technology. It permits students to function to their academic potential in spite of their reading and writing challenges. For many students, it can serve as an essential writing tool.

Susan Waite is a speech-language pathologist at the secondary school level with the English Montreal School Board.

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Sports by Daniel Smajovits



Martial arts keep body and mind active

By Eleni Giannakis

ADAMA (Association de développement des arts martiaux adaptés) is a non-profit organization that was created in 2009 by Mohamed Jelassi to help people with autism and other special needs. ADAMA offers adapted classes in martial arts, such as Karate, Judo, and JiuJitsu. While ADAMA originated on the South Shore, it now has schools in the Montreal area, including Laval, St-Jean-Sur-Richelieu, Terrebonne, and Repentigny.

André Langevin has a Black Belt, is an RCMP officer, and is father to 23-year-old Philippe, who has autism. He decided to try karate as a method of therapy for Philippe, and was delighted to see how it benefitted him.

The adapted martial arts classes offered by ADAMA quickly grew. ADAMA now has hundreds of students. The benefits to this program are significant for people with mild to severe autism and other disabilities. They can include advanced motor skills, more focus, communication skills, and exercise which keeps the body and mind active.

Langevin is now vice-president of ADAMA, which offers classes for children from the age of three to into their 20s, and boasts a staff of five teachers. They offer sessions at the Gold Centre in Montreal, where two of



Philippe receiving his black belt.
(Photo credit, ADAMA)

their instructors have autism.

"I was going through hell when Philippe was diagnosed with autism," Langevin said. "I was in denial but I just wanted to help him. He was suffering so much." His son, Philippe, is now helping his father by providing karate lessons, and studies at McGill University. "Philippe is not the same person he was. He's grown and has come a long way," adds Langevin.

Jelassi is an award-winning teacher and the president of ADAMA. He is a special education technician with the Commission scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys. In November 2016, he was awarded the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec's Prix A part entière at the National Assembly in

Québec City. "This is a non-profit organization. Mohamed is not doing this for fame or for money," says Langevin. "He just wants to help the students and the community with martial arts."

Volunteers are always welcome. Visit their website at: <http://www.adamacanada.org/>.



Jewish National Fund Canada and Maccabi Canada recently brought Israeli Paralympic Gold Medalist Noam Gershony (Wheelchair Tennis) and his inspirational message of perseverance to Canada. Gershony served as an Apache helicopter pilot in the Israeli Air Force and was gravely injured in a mid-air helicopter collision during the 2006 Lebanon War. At the time, doctors did not believe he would survive. After a six-month medical rehabilitation, Gershony was released from the hospital and took up Wheelchair Tennis, where he quickly began competing on an international level, representing Israel in tournaments around the world.

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The transition to high school for students with ASD

By Tania Piperni M.Ed

Research and experience show that change is difficult for students with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). One such event occurs when beginning high school. This is overwhelming for most students but it is augmented for our students with ASD. Making this new environment more familiar prior to the actual transition can help ease anxiety.

At the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), the Student Services Department's Autism Task Force Committee created a transition timeline in order to better address this time of change. This timeline includes suggestions on how to gradually prepare Grade 6 students for high school. The package includes guidelines about what to expect in high school and helps normalize anxiety levels. It outlines how the outgoing elementary school can coordinate with the receiving high school in order to schedule school visits. During such a visit, students

are encouraged to take photos of some staff and/or different environments. These photos can be reviewed throughout the year and over the summer. The surroundings will become more familiar and consequently reduce emotional difficulties at the start of the school year.

The EMSB offers a variety of high school programs: regular inclusive classrooms, resource classrooms, Allongé programs, Aim High program, and special education programs. Irrespective of the chosen school or program, the goal is to make this transition easier for all involved, i.e. students, school staff, as well as parents. Advance planning and collaboration greatly benefit everyone involved.

Students may differ in their reactions to this change. Some may display anxiety through visible behaviours such as increased fidgeting, difficulty sleeping, being more reserved. Other signs may not be as noticeable but are equally important. School visits can help reduce anxiety and make the new

environment more familiar.

Parents are an integral part of this transition. They too can experience anxiety due to the upcoming change. Therefore, they are encouraged to take part in these school visits. During the summer, together they can review the guidelines and photos in order to keep the information familiar in their child's mind. Driving by the new school as well as travel training the child, i.e. practicing the bus route from home to school, can also be beneficial.

Answering children's questions and letting them know most of their peers feel the same way helps normalize the emotion. Organizing time for the child to spend with a peer who will attend the same school can help foster this friendship and alleviate some nervousness. Parents can also contact the high school at the end of August to schedule one last visit before classes start.

Once school begins, parents can help colour code the class schedule in order to bet-

ter help organize their child. For example, English classes can be coloured in red on the schedule to coordinate with the red school supplies (binder, notebook) for that class. The weekly school schedule can also be enlarged for an easier read. Lastly, the schedule can be cut into sections so the student can have easy access to the list of classes for one day rather than scanning a longer weekly version.

Many high school teachers offer online support for parents and students with postings of grades, lists of upcoming assignments and a way to communicate with teachers. Parents can help their child stay on task and be more prepared for the class material. These suggestions help promote autonomy as well as ease the transition into high school.

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

Autism and work can go together, says pioneering former U.S. exec Randy Lewis

By Martin C. Barry

During a presentation in Laval on January 31 to municipal and local chamber of commerce officials, former U.S. pharmacy retail chain executive Randy Lewis made the case as to why businesses should think seriously about fostering diversity in the workplace to include employees with autism as well as other disabilities.

Lewis was a senior executive at Walgreens for 16 years at a time when the company was undergoing major expansion to become the largest pharmacy chain in the world. His son, Austin, was diagnosed with autism at age three.

Although Austin spoke only in short phrases during his first nine years, by 10 "all of a sudden he started talking and if you met him today you will think he is trying to make up for lost time," said his father. It was during his time at Walgreens that Lewis decided to

launch a program to provide opportunities to the autistic and disabled to work side by side with mainstream workers.

Two distribution centers were opened where the staff consisted of approximately 40 percent of disabled persons. The model ended up being so successful that other companies such as Clarks Shoes International, Glaxo Smith Kline, Best Buy, and Costco have either examined it or placed it under consideration.

While profit margins at Walgreens were thin and the competition fierce, Lewis was convinced shareholders would be well served, while Walgreens could "do good at the same time."

Walgreens also went about changing the way it hired people in order to take into account traits which might ordinarily exclude certain persons with disabilities. It was "a different way of doing things," said Lewis, maintaining that the measures introduced

at a Walgreens distribution centre ended up making it "the most productive centre in the 100-year history of our company."

Nick Katalifos, principal of the EMSB's Roslyn School and chairman of the board of directors of Giant Steps School for autistic children, was among those who were impressed by Lewis's presentation. "As the parents of a child living with autism, my wife and I were not only inspired by Randy's words of encouragement regarding the potential for employment that all people with disabilities have, but the fact that he presented very concrete ideas, approaches and successes to the audience," Katalifos said afterwards.

"We have heard Randy's message several times and have had the opportunity to work directly with him," he added. "Because of this, we are actively working on projects and programs at Giant Steps – such as our Inclusive Cities initiative – that will potentially benefit our son, Manoli, as well as so many other individuals on the spectrum."



Retired U.S. pharmacy executive Randy Lewis successfully implemented a new system that saw large scale hiring of disabled persons at some of his company's distribution centers.



Social Tree Foundation addresses the challenges of finding work with ASD

By Brent Strumph

Alex looks just like any other 21-year-old. He wears a big smile and laughs easily. He engages in casual conversation, but looks at you with little variation in facial expression. You don't know whether he's listening to you or focused on something else.

He tends to laugh and use sarcasm inappropriately. His answers are to the point with no elaboration or explanation. He graduated high school with honors. He's not anti-social, but he does have difficulty relating to others in social settings. Alex has autism spectrum disorder (ASD). These characteristics makes it difficult for him to find or maintain meaningful work.

Individuals with autism have the lowest employment rate when compared to those with other impairments including intellectual disabilities, Down syndrome, and learning disabilities.

Because of difficulties with social interaction, sensory overload, non-verbal and verbal communication, people with autism are misunderstood by human resource departments and have difficulty getting hired. The reason is simple – first impressions are important.

Social Tree Foundation was created to bridge this gap and provide support to individuals with autism and their families. The foundation will develop a career center to provide information and interventions throughout the working career of each client, regardless of the severity of their ASD. It will act as the primary source for discovering employment opportunities, interview preparation, and career development.

Co-founder and president, Francesca Dansereau, has extensive knowledge within the clinical and research field of autism. She is passionate about her work, recognizing that

(Continued on Page 33)



Social Tree co-founders Charlie Arciresi, Francesca Dansereau, and Brian Olton. (Photo credit, Wendy Singer)

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Gearing up to celebrate at Autism Speaks Canada Walk

By Valentina Basilicata

For the fifth year in a row, 18-year-old Pietro Cammalleri and his mother and full-time caregiver Lori-Ann Zemanovich are preparing for a special event they have affectionately dubbed the “autism pride parade.”

“Autism is something to be celebrated, not something to be pitied or thought of as a cross to bear,” explains Zemanovich, whose son was diagnosed at age three. “The blessings have far outweighed any of the burdens.”

A longtime autism advocate and active volunteer in her community, Zemanovich is proudly chairing the 2017 Montreal Autism Speaks Canada (ASC) Walk taking place Sunday, May 28 at the McGill University Tomlinson Fieldhouse. Families with children of all ages will attend to support each other and the cause. “We go there to stand in pride and celebration, and welcome other people to find all of the good, positivity and support that is out there,” shares Zemanovich.

Already in its seventh edition, the Montreal walk, which generated over \$95,000 last year, is ASC’s signature event. Funds raised go towards research, collaboration and community services while creating awareness for autism. The Montreal walk is one of eight held across the country annually, and has pumped nearly half a million dol-

lars into Quebec’s family services through community organizations.

“We give back to the community with our grants,” explains Krista Leitham, Quebec’s regional walk manager at ASC. She highlights there is a need to focus more on teens and young adults with autism because services for this age group aren’t easy to come by. “I’ve seen many, many more grant applications coming through [from] organizations that are servicing and focusing on the older age group,” she says. As children enter their teen years, parents are looking beyond education options toward employability and self-sufficiency, according to Leitham.

A divorced mom of two, Zemanovich sacrificed her career to support her son. Although technically a young adult, Cammalleri is unable to live independently. Leitham is confident Zemanovich and Cammalleri’s story will inspire other families dealing with this transitional period, as well as those just beginning on their autism journey. “She has been preparing herself for this time in her son’s life. Bringing her on as walk chair lends the community a voice of empowerment, but also of hope,” remarks Leitham.

Zemanovich, like many parents living with adult children on the spectrum, is frustrated by the long wait times for permanent housing, employment programs and specialized activities. She wants to bring attention to the limited services for this older population living with autism. She has also decided to take matters into her own hands; she plans

to create a nonprofit organization to fund and service a community home for intellectually handicapped adults like her son.

Rachelle Parent, 19, and her family have also been proactive in the autism community. Rachelle was only officially diagnosed with autism in 2015. She, along with her parents Sylvia Wong and Martin Parent, were first time participants at the Montreal walk last year.



Sylvia Wong with her daughter Rachelle Parent.

“I really wanted Rachelle to understand who she was. Part of that was letting her know there are people around just like her,” says Wong. “I thought [the walk] was a great way for her to sort of “come out” and to enjoy the day and the activities.” Wong describes the atmosphere at the event as a “party,” adding that having access to numerous sponsors in one location opened her eyes to what is available within the community. Both parents are looking toward helping their daughter acquire independent living skills and employment.

Within a short period of time, the family raised nearly \$1,400 dollars for the 2016

walk. This year, dad is setting off on an Arctic trek in the Auyuittuq National Park in Nunavut to raise money. His total campaign will bring in nearly over \$10,000, which will benefit ASC and garner much needed attention for the cause.

For information visit www.ascwalk.ca.

Valentina Basilicata is a freelance journalist and communications specialist. She is also the proud mom of two boisterous, lovable boys.

(Social Tree Foundation continued from Page 32)

the proper support and interventions can help individuals find work that utilizes their unique talents.

“Every person with ASD has their individual strengths and weaknesses and will exhibit different abilities regardless of diagnosis,” said Dansereau. “While they may be lacking in social skills, they each excel in different programs and areas of expertise. Each person should be encouraged to find their place.”

Ideally, career development should start early so that areas of weakness can be improved. Interests, talents and strengths can be recognized and nurtured.

ASD is a neurological disorder that requires support in a multifaceted way, through oc-

cupational therapy, speech therapy, Relationship Development Intervention® therapy, Applied Behavior Analysis therapy, and other therapies to address learning difficulties, attention difficulties, anxiety, psychiatric illnesses, sleep disorders, as well as gastrointestinal and immune system disorders.

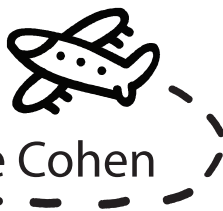
Social Tree has united many well-established and reputable professionals, with extensive training in the field of autism, including Board directors Charles Arciresi and Brian Olton, whose lives have both been touched by a person with autism. As co-founders of the foundation, they have a profound desire to make a difference in the lives of the individual with autism and their families.

For more information on Social Tree Foundation visit thesocialtree.org or contact francesca.dansereau@mail.mcgill.ca.

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Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen



ST. PETERSBURG/CLEARWATER, FLORIDA: Over the years my family and I have had many enjoyable trips to Florida. In most cases, we stayed in the Miami Beach area. However, working with the Canadian office of Visit Florida (www.visitflorida.com), I made my first trip to the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area (<http://www.visitstpeteclearwater.com>).

White sandy Florida beaches with crystal-clear water, a foodie and arts scene praised by Travel & Leisure, and glittering nightlife options that range from craft beer bars to New York-style dance clubs in the St. Petersburg/Clearwater area are among the endless choices for whatever kind of vacation you yearn, be it rejuvenating or exhilarating.

Along with award-winning beautiful beaches, St. Petersburg is home to the world-renowned Salvador Dali Museum, top-rated restaurants and beautiful Fort De Soto Park. This waterfront escape is a perfect family getaway with so much to explore. The city, which glimmers between the Gulf of Mexico and Tampa Bay, is known for its warm weather and for holding the title of “most consecutive days with sunshine” at 768. Downtown St. Petersburg is the city’s heart, home to great shopping, restaurants, bars and attractions.

After making a stop to check out the largest collection of Dali’s work outside of Spain, swing by the Chihuly Collection on pictur-

esque Beach Drive to witness mind-blowing glasswork. Beach Drive anchors downtown shopping, dining and entertainment districts that include outdoor cafes and restaurants, world class museums and a dazzling array of shops, galleries, businesses, hotels and bed and breakfasts that line the city’s pedestrian-friendly streets.

We went to the Dali Museum (<http://thedali.org>) on a Thursday evening. Located in the heart of downtown St. Petersburg, this is home to an unparalleled collection of Salvador Dali art. It features more than 2,000 works, comprising nearly 100 oil paintings, over 100 watercolors and drawings and 1,300 prints, photographs, sculptures and art objects. The building is itself a work of art, featuring 1,062 triangular-shaped glass panels—the only structure of its kind in North America. Nicknamed The Enigma, it provides an unprecedented view of St. Petersburg’s picturesque waterfront. The Museum has attracted the world’s attention, and was listed by AOL Travel News as “one of the top buildings to see in your lifetime.”

The museum’s galleries are wheelchair accessible. There are four wheelchairs for public use, available on a first come, first serve basis, and cannot be reserved. There are designated accessible parking spaces located in the blacktop parking lots immediately adjacent to the museum’s south and west sides. The building was designed and constructed according to current ADA stan-

dards. In the course of planning for future expansions and renovations, The Dali is committed to a building providing full access to all. The Dali Museum is located at One Dali Boulevard. For additional information contact (727) 823-3767.

Downtown St. Petersburg is known for its urban art scene, where you can see dozens of painted murals on a stroll down Central Ave. The St. Pete Mural Tour takes you on a guided journey through the colorful streets of the city with tours led by local artists who uncover the vibrant stories of the creators behind the murals. You might also want to check out the Museum of Fine Arts or the Florida Holocaust Museum.

There are some live theatre options here. Visit the Sunken Gardens, a botanical paradise in the midst of the city. As St. Petersburg’s oldest living museum, this 100-year-old garden is home to some of the oldest tropical plants in the region.

We met some people with young kids who really enjoyed the Great Explorations Children’s Museum. Designed for children 10 and under, the 24,000 square foot museum is filled with exhibits and activities to stimulate learning through creativity, play and exploration. The museum is a learning playground where children can make a discovery, make a mess, and even make a new friend.

The parking lot is accessible to all types of transportation including buses, vans and cars. Designated handicap parking spaces are located to the west of the front entrance.

Restrooms are located off the main lobby of Sunken Gardens on the first floor adjacent to the museum. They are accessible to everyone. Service animals are welcome.

The museum is accessible to wheelchair users and other visitors who need to avoid stairs. The gallery floor has an open floor plan for easy accessibility, and exhibits are designed to be wheelchair friendly. A wheelchair is available free of charge on a first-come first-served basis. Ask the volunteer at the front desk for assistance. The museum is listed as Autism Friendly in the Center for Autism and Related Disabilities (CARD) Autism Friendly Business Directory. For information or to request special arrangements, contact the Director of Education at (727) 821-8992, ext. 209.

Clearwater is about 45 minutes away. The Clearwater Marine Aquarium is the home of Winter and Hope, stars of the sequel to box office hit “Dolphin Tale.” Clearwater Marine Aquarium operates as a marine hospital with its main mission to rescue, re-

habilitate and release. Consider a Dolphin Cruise aboard the Sea Screamer. Soak in the sunshine aboard a dolphin cruise in the Gulf of Mexico. Watch as dolphins play in the boat’s wake by wowing everyone with playful jumps. This area is home to the largest pod of Atlantic bottlenose dolphins. Take a stroll to Sunsets at Pier 60 festival - a local institution in Clearwater Beach. This free, family event takes place 365 days a year, weather permitting.

In compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act, the city of St. Petersburg recently began the process of updating its ADA Self Evaluation and Transition Plan to ensure that its public facilities, services, and programs are accessible to people with disabilities.

CAPI (The Committee to Advocate for Persons with Impairments) is a group of residents appointed by the Mayor with advice and consent of City Council. The function of CAPI is to advise city council on issues and to advocate on behalf of persons with disabilities. CAPI provides the city with guidance relative to the concerns, rights, special needs and dignity of persons with disabilities to ensure their full participation in and enjoyment of the city’s facilities, programs, and services.

As for Clearwater, disabled persons can enjoy the city with more ease, thanks to continuing efforts to make the confines and attractions accessible to everyone. Ensuring compliance with ADA requirements, curb ramps have been installed throughout the city, making city sidewalks wheelchair accessible. Sand wheelchairs are available free of charge from 9:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. from March 1 to Labour Day. After Labour Day through the end of February, sand wheelchairs are available from 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. each day. Patrons can borrow one from the Beach Lifeguard building located on the south end of the Pier 60 parking lot.

Clearwater’s aquatic facilities are ADA compliant. The Long Center training pool, North Greenwood pool, Ross Norton pool, and Clearwater Beach pool all have wheelchair ramps. The Long Center main pool and Morningside pool have lifts. The Long Center pool is open year-round; the other pools are open seasonally. Lifts are available at the Clearwater Community Sailing Center out on the floating docks, along with appropriate ramps, restrooms on both floors and an elevator to service to the second floor. The facility currently is undergoing improvements to become an official Paralympics Training Facility for sailing, one of few in the nation. Guide dogs and guide dogs-in-training are permitted entrance into all city events, public meetings, facilities,



Clearwater Beach



and buildings. All buses and trolleys are wheelchair-accessible.

WHERE TO STAY: We were very fortunate to obtain accommodations at the Beach House Suites by Don CeSar (<https://www.doncesar.com>). The hotel debuted its total room renovation in February 2016, introducing 70 brand-new all-suite accommodations. The resort, located directly on St. Pete Beach and just one-half mile from the iconic and posh Don CeSar Hotel, is perfect for extended stays, smaller groups and families. Each suite includes a separate living room with sofa bed, washers and dryers and a kitchenette with mini-refrigerator, dishwasher, Keurig coffeemaker, microwave, toaster and induction stove top. Special details such as spectacular views of the Gulf of Mexico, private balconies and stellar Loews-style service complement the new suites and make vacations at Beach House Suites that much more memorable. We felt very much at home.

Beach House Suites is a non-smoking property and welcomes pets (\$45 per night pet fee applies). There is a daily resort fee of \$25 per room. This entitles guests to all the amenities and activities at the Don CeSar Hotel.

When we first booked this place we were excited to know that we had full access to the Don CeSar. You can get there by walking, via the shuttle or taking your own vehicle. I was even provided with a neat book upon checking in about the hotel's history. They even provided guided tours each day. We quickly discovered that lounging by the pool at the Beach House Suites was a solid option. For one thing, the pool area was never overly crowded. The pool attendants set up our chairs and umbrellas each day. We

swam in the nicely heated pool and took advantage of the warm and soothing Jacuzzi. Nice music plays on the speaker system. You can play a game of ping pong, shuffleboard or check out the giant chessboard. There is a full bar where you can get some great smoothies and food items – the latter delivered within a half hour from the Don CeSar. And of course it is a nice option to be able to go back to your own room when you wish for a rest, collect some snacks or make a sandwich.

Manager Andrew Isherwood and his staff do pay close attention to everyone's needs. I was impressed with how quickly Andrew remembered the names and room numbers of each guest. During his daily walkabouts he'd stop me near the pool or lobby to find out how everything was going. It is this type of individual attention I truly appreciated about the Beach House Suites.

We did take advantage though of the full resort privileges at the Don CeSar, aka the Pink Palace, where room charging options are available. There are two beachfront heated pools. The poolside concierge provides everything from cucumber hydration to tropical smoothies. For those who are physically disabled, the pools and whirlpools at both complexes have special lifts.

The Don CeSar Hotel partners with the award-winning Boucher Brothers Management to pamper guests during their day on the beautiful St. Pete Beach. Take a walk from the pool deck and have some fun on the Gulf of Mexico, seeing the beautiful pink castle from a different view while cruising on wave runners or exploring on ocean kayaks. We got to spend one day lounging in private daybeds and chilling out on a chaise for a luxurious take on fun in the sun at the

Loews. Lunch and drinks were available right at our chairs via the Beachcomber. We also took advantage of the Jet Ski rentals. This was a real "rush" for my family.

The hotel has several ADA (American Disability Act) sanctioned rooms. There are eight at the main resort, including one of the Penthouse suites, and four ADA sanctioned rooms at Beach House Suites. These rooms include roll-in showers and in the Beach House Suites the washer and dryer units are next to each other, rather than stacked on top of each other.

Hearing impaired guests can take advantage of written materials that they receive upon check-in, including the Daily Resort Activities guide and reading boards that are on the lobby floor next to the elevators. The hotel also provides notepads and pens for speech and hearing impaired guests who would prefer to communicate in writing. The bell desk employees offer to escort guests with vision and hearing impairments to their rooms and other hotel outlets. Those with hearing disabilities receive a TDD phone, closed caption decoder and a device that flashes and vibrates the bed when the phone rings, door opens and alarm is activated. These services are demonstrated to guests upon arrival. When speaking with someone in a wheelchair, team members kneel down to speak to the person at eye level. Obstacles like chairs are moved out of a vision impaired person's way. Vision impaired people are offered a team member's arm if that person prefers to be guided. Team members offer assistance with pushing wheelchairs and thoroughly explain wheelchair accessible routes. If someone has a hand coordination disability and is dining in one of the restaurants, an offer is made to cut their food for them.

While we were there we saw the stars of the TLC reality show *The Little Couple*, Bill Klein and Jen Arnold, with their children at the hotel. Bill and Jen are "Little People," both under four feet tall. They are true inspirations to not letting their handicap stand in the way of anything.

MARITANA GRILL: It turned out that one of the more outstanding restaurants in St. Pete was right at the Don CeSar. The Maritana Grille exudes fine dining. Our meal there was a true experience, thanks very much in part to our superb server Tim who guided us perfectly through each portion. There is a reason why this made it as a USA Today 10 best acclaimed restaurant. It features food sourced from local farms, dairies, and fishermen and includes traditional contemporary favorites prepared with a creative twist. The menu is accented with an extensive wine list, first-class service, and a stunning setting, graced by dazzling

salt water aquariums. Ask about the private Chef's Table, where your entire dinner experience is specially created and presented by the talented culinary team—the perfect setting for special occasions or whenever the mood strikes. In this case you are seated right in the kitchen.

We began with some drinks, the pink pearl consisting of Chopin vodka, Chambord, champagne sparkle and fresh raspberry. On this night, a fabulous seafood platter was available. It consisted of some crabs, large shrimp and six kusshi British Columbia oysters, with champagne mignonette and cocktail sauce. In addition, we ordered some delicious tuna sashimi (with ginger vinaigrette, lemongrass aioli and ginger crunch) to share while one member of the party selected the roasted carrot bisque. This literally tasted like candy it was so good, featuring toasted coriander, lime and chili oil.

For the main course, Tim went over the many sumptuous options. We took some time before settling on three dishes: Maine lobster, with hand cut pappardelle, asparagus spears, trumpet mushrooms and lobster cream; an extraordinary serving of Chilean sea bass, with confit potatoes, asparagus, oyster mushrooms, herb foam and port lemon reduction; and an Anderson Ranch Lamb Rack, with celery root purée, sweet pea gnocchi, carrots and mint pesto. Tim would also make a great sommelier, for he matched different glasses of wine with each of our dinners to absolute perfection.

The dessert options were tantalizing to say the least. We opted for the olive oil cake (white chocolate ice cream, vanilla custard, black pepper strawberries and olive oil powder), the key lime semi fredo (graham cracker whipped cream, crushed blackberry sauce, meringue kisses and blackberry sherbet) and mocha spheres (dark chocolate espresso, coconut ice cream, caramel cream and cocoa toast). This was definitely an opportunity to share, so we dove into each one at a time. Needless to say, there was not a crumb left on any of the plates.

Open for dinner daily at 5:30 pm, reservations are strongly recommended. You can call (727) 360-1882 and log on to the full menu on the hotel website. Hats off to chef Mouhssine Benhamacht and his team.

The restaurant is situated at the main level of the hotel and fully wheelchair accessible.

Mike Cohen is the editor of Inspirations. He can be reached at mcohen@inspirationsnews.com.



Beach House Suites living room.



Inspirational Book Review



By Stuart Nulman

Without One Word Spoken by Ellen Schwartz (Brilliant Idea Books, \$24.95)

In a speech that she delivered to her Grade 11 English class, Beverly Schwartz of Toronto set up this thought-provoking scenario:

“I would like everyone to take a moment to think about your most treasured memory. One moment where you felt utter bliss. Maybe it was watching the sunset on the last night of summer. Or when you took the first bite of that really good burger. Maybe it was the feeling when you finished that race for which you’ve trained for months. Now imagine if you couldn’t see that sunset. Couldn’t swallow that burger. And it would be impossible for you to ever finish that race. Right now you are imagining the life of my brother Jacob.”

When Jacob Schwartz was a baby, he was diagnosed with Canavan Disease, a rare, yet fatal, neurodegenerative disease that attacks the central nervous system. Children who have this disease cannot crawl, walk, sit, talk, and may end up suffering seizures as well as become paralyzed and/or blind. Life expectancy can be as short as four years, yet some children live well into their teens.

Jacob Schwartz falls into the latter category. Raising a child with Canavan Disease is a challenge to his family, to say the least. Yet with his parents Jeff and Ellen, and siblings Ben and Beverly, Jacob has lived a life not only filled with challenges, but also with a lot of the joys that come with living a complete life. A main part of why this has become possible is Jacob’s overwhelmingly positive outlook he has for everything. With a broad smile on his face, Jacob’s determination to remain positive throughout all the struggles that he has endured has made him appreciate life even more, and has given him a better understanding of how even the smallest things can give him the greatest feeling of happiness.

This sense of positivity that Jacob possesses has not only motivated and inspired his entire family, but practically every person he has encountered throughout his 18 years and counting. And to further that, his mother has realized that all of these wonderful experiences that have happened to Jacob thanks to his positive outlook has given her many life lessons that she graciously applies to a situation that on the surface is difficult.

With that in mind, Ellen has decided to share those life lessons she has learned from Jacob with the publication of her book *Without One Word Spoken*.

The book is a collection of 18 stories – one for every year of Jacob’s life so far – that relates to special moments in his life, from the unique way his bar mitzvah was celebrated, to the successful Jake Challenge bracelets, to the Jake’s Jam musical charity fundraiser event. Each chapter is concluded with a list of special life lessons that have been derived from these moments that are practical and inspirational in nature, but anyone can apply to their own lives and challenges, and can help one to live a life of fulfillment.

Although Ellen Schwartz continues her valiant work to increase awareness of neurodegenerative diseases and help find a cure through her organization Jacob’s Ladder, she realizes that the ravages of Canavan Disease are beginning to deteriorate Jacob’s health as he enters his

19th year. Yet with the reaffirming lessons she has learned from the miracle that is Jacob Schwartz’s life, she can face these challenges with a much more courageous outlook. Thanks to her book, we can also utilize these precious lessons towards our own life challenges, whether they be physical, emotional or spiritual.



Jacob Schwartz surrounded by his sister Bev, brother Ben, mother Ellen, and father Jeff. (Photo credit, Darren Levant Photography)

IEP planning: Tips for a successful academic year

By Linda Mastroianni

In just a few short weeks school will be over and another academic year will be behind us. Hopefully you can look back on this academic year with a positive reflection. If you’re experiencing some difficulty with your child and/or with school, don’t worry. You can learn from these moments and apply your newfound knowledge for the next time.

The start of a new school year can bring a certain amount of anxiety both for the student and parents. Securing the right resources for your child with special needs can be equally worrisome.

An IEP (Individualized Education Plan) is a written document that either modifies or

adapts the educational program for the specific student. IEPs are created to identify the student’s needs, adjust the curriculum accordingly and provide necessary support.

Whether you are new to the IEP process or not, it is almost always a stressful time for parents. It doesn’t have to be. Being well prepared and open to discussing different possibilities in your child’s academic learning can make a world of difference.

Here are a few tips to help you towards a successful IEP meeting and academic year:

- Discuss goals ahead of time. You don’t have to wait until the IEP meeting to get knowledge of what your child’s teacher and support team are working on with your child. Having an open line of communication and asking these questions

throughout the year allows you time to take notes and be better prepared for your meeting.

- Make a list. Write down all of your questions, concerns and objectives for your child. It may be two or three points that need to be discussed but all too often nerves come into play and parents tend to forget something important.
- Bring outside support. This can be a therapist who has worked with your child or even a special education consultant who can offer knowledge and moral support.
- Set clear and measurable goals. IEPs should definitely be changing as the child is developing and achieving their goals. Depending on the child, an IEP should have both short and long term goals.
- IEPs are not only for academic purposes. They should address all areas of dif-

ficulty, not only academic learning. For example, if a student has poor gross and fine motor skills, accommodations to address these needs should reflect in his/her IEP.

Request for additional support or resources for the next academic year are made to the school in the month of April.

A new academic year with new teachers and a new IEP to discuss can be very overwhelming for any parent. Being prepared for it can ease much of this anxiety, making you more focused on securing resources for your child.

Linda Mastroianni is founder of www.SpeakingAutism.ca She is a writer, special education consultant, parent coach and public speaker on autism.

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By Nick Katalifos

Let the 'Games for Hope' begin!

ily from Montreal's corporate sector, who believe in supporting children's causes. Together they collected more than \$1.9 million, and raised an impressive 370 thousand at their Corporate Sports Tournament last June. The tournament was held at Le Complexe Sportif Bell (the Montreal Canadiens practice facility in Brossard).

This year, for its 15th edition, the foundation is supporting Leucan, a well-regarded foundation that promotes the well-being of cancer-stricken children and their families; the Breakfast Club of Canada, well-known for its programs which focus upon nourishing children; and Giant Steps School, a highly respected special needs school that caters exclusively to autistic students. The fundraising goal for this year is \$400 thousand. This money will go far towards supporting the important work at all three charities.

The obvious question is how is this all done? The one-day Corporate Sports Tournament brings teams together that are made up of the 'who's who' of Montreal's corporate world. They participate in several sports, including ice hockey, ball hockey, soccer, basketball and volleyball, and fundraise as

Each year a multitude of creative fundraising efforts are organized to support causes that are important to each of us for very different and often very personal reasons. Usually, they are created with a specific mandate or cause in mind. The Games for Hope Foundation was established in 2001, and functions in a different and innovative way. They raise funds through a variety of means, primarily their annual Corporate Sports Tournament, which benefits three children's charities which they choose through a rigorous selection process.

Some of the charities that this Foundation has supported over the past 15 years include: The Children's Wish Foundation; The Missing Children's Network; Shriner's Hospital for Children – Canada, Starlight Children's Foundation; and the Sainte-Justine Hospital Foundation, among others.

This philanthropic effort is completely driven by young, dedicated volunteers, primar-



Games for Hope presents a cheque to The Breakfast Club of Canada, Leucan, and Starlight Children's Foundation at their 14th annual Corporate Sports Tournament on June 18, 2016. (Photo credit, Games for Hope)

a team. In order to enter the tournament, teams are required to reach the requested fundraising requests that Games for Hopes mandates. To succeed, teams organize their efforts months in advance. Companies and individuals can choose to simply sponsor the event. Families are welcome, with games and activities available for the kids.

The Corporate Sports Tournament will take

place on Saturday, June 17, 2017 from 10:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. For information, to donate or to get involved visit www.GamesForHope.org or contact marcod@GamesForHope.org.

Nick Katalifos is the principal of Roslyn Elementary School, the chairman of Giant Steps School and Resource Centre, and special advisor to Inspirations.

(JEM Workshops continued from Page 25)

"For the vast majority of employees, this is their one and only opportunity to be productive members of society, to earn an income, and to be treated with dignity in a work setting," says Danny Kay, managing director of JEM Workshop, adding that in any given year, there are approximately 10 openings at the Workshop due to retirement or inability to work. Although the centre is a Jewish organization funded partially by Federation CJA and Emploi Québec, employees are of all faiths and backgrounds.

Kay notes that while the workplace is adapted to meet special needs, companies that outsource to them can be assured that the quality of work is very high. "When working with JEM Workshop, it's not a donation – it's a win-win work relationship," he says. "We are cost competitive and small and large product runs can be done here. We provide assurance that quality and norms are respected, as well as timely delivery. Additionally, there's a social consciousness as-

pect – but that is the second step."

From shrink packing, date code printing, light assembly, collating and much more, the workers are trained and supervised by professional packaging experts. Customers include Dollarama, Groupe Marcelle, Saputo, A.R Medico and Moroccanoil, to name a few.

"Working with JEM has been an extraordinary experience for Moroccanoil and has proven to be a great partnership over the years," says Gerardo Ludert, Chief Operations Officer at Moroccanoil. "Their work is top-notch and has nothing to envy in quality to the services we could get from other suppliers. Overall, we are extremely satisfied with our decision to partner with JEM and we look forward to many years of working together."

For Heath Wald's mother, Gersha Zohar, who lives with, and cares for her son, JEM Workshop offers an outlet for them both.

"He doesn't have the same level of anxiety that he used to have and doesn't have to put on airs at JEM Workshop," says Zohar. "It is a burden off my shoulders knowing he's going to work everyday. When he's at work, it's respite for me, and he comes home happy, telling me stories. He is happy – and that is basically because of where he works."

Visit www.jemworkshop.org or www.facebook.com/AtelierJEMWorkshop for information.

Cindy Davis is the Manager of Public Relations and Social Media at the Jewish Public Library as well as a freelance journalist, editor and PR Consultant.

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