

# INSPIRATIONS



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with special needs

*Edward Murphy Elementary School student Liam Farias Trindade enjoys interacting with NAO. Read the full story on page 14 of this edition.  
(Photo, Wendy Singer)*

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by Lisa Friedman, 2013.

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# The Dynamic Funds Caregiver Team of Inspiration

## The East Foundation: Center of Dreams & Hopes

By Cindy Davis

When you set foot in The Center of Dreams & Hopes, you know that you are in a very special place. The cheery building on Boulevard Lacordaire in Montreal's East end is a non-profit organization that provides therapeutic and recreational programs to individuals with special needs from the age of five and up, and encourages integration into mainstream educational, social and leisure activities. The adult education program is divided into three groups according to the client's level of functioning, and days are filled with singing, art, cooking, learning and socializing. But what truly stands out when spending time there, is how deeply the staff of the Center care for their clients - and for each other.

That is why The Center of Dreams & Hopes office administrator, Anna Pimentel, nominated the Center's extraordinary team of educators and caregivers for the Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration Award. "They are special individuals," says Pimentel. "It is a job, but you look at them and you don't feel like this is a workplace for them. They really care for their students."

Pimentel, whose daughter attends the program, says that as a parent of a child with special needs she realizes how truly exceptional the Center is. "When you have a child with special needs you understand how places are run. For the caregivers and educators here, they do it so naturally. It is something that they do with their heart. They have some very difficult days sometimes and it's not an easy job, but they go out of their way, they go over and above, they care."

Along with teachers Claudia Lazaro Lopez, Bianca Delle Donne and Danny Olivestein, who Pimentel notes are also deserving of an award, the educator and

caregiving team at the Center include Dina Mohamed, Christina Sorrentino, Angela Scarola, Maria Lopez Vazquez, Cynthia Cardazzi, and Eleni Lacopo. This power-team works together as a group to make sure that the students rise to their full potential.

"We're caregivers, we're the therapists, we're like their social workers," chuckles educator Dina Mohamed. "We provide a lot of the care aspect to the field. We clean them, we help them with their walker - we're basically their support system." Mohamed says that because their role is to assist the teacher, many of the students view the educators and caregivers as best friends rather than authority figures. "We try to create very meaningful relationships where they feel extremely comfortable with us - share situations. They are adults and they want to have those types of relationships too."

The Center of Dreams & Hopes, whose mother company is The East Foundation, functions under the auspices of Wagar School of the English Montreal School Board. Founded in 1999, by parents of children with special needs who found there was a lack of English services in Montreal's East end and Laval, the Foundation was originally run out of the Leonardo Da Vinci Centre until it moved to its current space in 2009. The Center offers occupational therapy, speech and other therapies as well as a summer camp and weekend respite care.

No two days are the same, say the educators and caregivers, as they work hard to ensure that the students are always stimulated. Through lessons, art projects, cooking activities, group outings and a work program, the Center strives to provide productive lives for their students after the school years. "Adult centers are so important," says Mohamed. "They



The team at the Center of Dreams & Hopes. From left: Maria Lopez Vazquez, Bianca Delle Donne, Dina Mohamed, Danny Olivestein, Claudia Lazaro Lopez, Christina Sorrentino and Angela Scarola.  
(Missing from the photo: Cynthia Cardazzi and Eleni Lacopo)

(families) don't know where to go after 21 years old, so for me, we want to make sure that they come here, they are stimulated, they learn, they feel important, they have a reason to live."

Despite what can sometimes be long hard days for the educators and caregivers, this enthusiastic and committed bunch say they would never consider working a desk job and that the rewards of working with the special needs population are immeasurable. "When they accomplish something that they didn't think they could do, you see the light beam in their eyes," says educator Angela Scarola. "We jump up and down."

The parents at the Center can trust that their children are being cared for, says Pimentel, who is thrilled that the group won this award. "Some of these kids are

non-verbal and can't go home and say, I had a good day or a bad day - the parents can feel it," says Pimentel. "I think every parent here has that reassurance, that, you know, my child is happy."

For more information on The Center of Dreams & Hopes and The East Foundation, email [cdh@bellnet.ca](mailto:cdh@bellnet.ca) or visit [www.eastfoundation.ca](http://www.eastfoundation.ca).

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## FROM THE HOUSE

# One-on-one with MP Cheryl Hardcastle

By Hayley Chazan



MP Cheryl Hardcastle speaks in the House of Commons.  
(Photo, Office of MP Cheryl Hardcastle)

The NDP critic for Sport and Persons with Disabilities sat down with *Inspirations'* Ottawa Bureau Chief Hayley Chazan to discuss her passion for social justice and what her party is doing to encourage disabled persons to run for elected office.

**HC:** Tell me about the kind of work you do as the critic for persons with disabilities. What makes you so passionate about this issue?

**CH:** I am passionate about all issues relating to social justice. I'm all about removing barriers, whether they're physical, economical or social. You start realizing as a parent or as an empathetic person that we need to see things through different lenses and that's something we haven't done for so long. My hope is that we come to a place where decision makers, whether they be policymakers, business, or community leaders, always take into consideration the needs of people with disabilities when making big decisions.

In April of last year, I introduced a Private Members' Bill in the House of Commons called C-348. The bill would require the Department of Employment and Social Development to provide information and guidance on applications for programs and services for which persons with disabilities may be eligible. It also seeks to implement a more streamlined

application process that would reduce the administrative burden on applicants. I picked something that wasn't spectacular or sensational, but rather something that was practical and achievable. I think it's important for us to break down barriers for Canadians living with disabilities and ensure that our system is not punitive or onerous.

**HC:** What is the NDP doing to encourage persons with disabilities to enter into public life?

**CH:** In general, it's hard for persons with disabilities to get elected to office, because a lot of times, to even get to that point, you need significant financial support. You may need special accommodations to attend community town halls, access campaign offices and read reports. All these things are costly and pose a barrier to entry for persons with disabilities. That is why the NDP established what is called the enAble fund. The fund was established by the NDP Persons Living with disAbilities Committee to provide financial support to NDP candidates living with visible and invisible disabilities. The fund helps with general campaign expenses as well as disability-related costs. Additionally, any NDP candidate may receive financial support for campaign expenditures for specific outreach and engagement with persons living with disabilities.

**HC:** What is your vision for an inclusive and accessible Canada?

**CH:** In my vision, Canada actively upholds and protects the equality of rights, enables equitable participation and opportunities, and demonstrates respect for and protects the dignity of all people living with disabilities, their families and significant others throughout Canadian society.

To get there, what we need to do first and foremost is to implement national standards that Canadian companies and organizations can look to when constructing buildings, establishing businesses and the like. We also need to establish how this is going to be monitored and enforced. We need this urgently because all we have right now is a patchwork of rules and regulations. I'm not trying to have the perfect accessibility act, I know

that. But I want to do my best to try and hone it and help it improve. I'm here to look at what I see as happening right now and how we can maximize it and do better with what we have.

*This interview has been edited for brevity and clarity.*



## INSPIRATIONS



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By Wendy Singer

## Notebook



As part of White Cane Week in early February, the CIUSS West-Central Montreal invited the public to experience the daily challenges that people with visual impairments face. The Montreal Association for the Blind (MAB)-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre set up information kiosks in the lobby of the Sir Mortimer B. Davis Jewish General Hospital. **Eleanor Diamond**, Braille Production Service, MAB-Mackay and user **Christine Theoret** were on hand to teach about Braille, and share adapted games for the visually impaired. The public also experienced navigating the hallways with a white cane or a guide dog. **Lucio Dintino**, president of the Users Committee at MAB-Mackay, and his guide dog **Obie** were present to greet visitors, as was **Alan Maislin**, president of the Board



Lucio Dintino and Obie, Francine Dupuis, and Alan Maislin at the SMBD-Jewish General Hospital during White Cane Week.

of Directors, and **Francine Dupuis**, associate CEO, CIUSS West-Central Montreal. Other activities organized by the CIUSS included blindfolded yoga and Braille bingo.

The **Leaders on Wheels** at the Mackay Centre School of the English Montreal School Board have raised more than \$5,000 over the last five years for the Montreal Children's Hospital (MCH) by selling their sauces, spice rub, and triple chocolate brownies. On March 1, the Leaders received a special visit from **Kim Fraser**, vice-president of Marketing and Communications at the MCH. She was so impressed by the Leaders' fundraising efforts that she came



The Leaders on Wheels enjoy Kim Fraser's (middle holding the tray of brownies) visit at Westmount High School.

to thank the group in person. They had a slew of questions prepared for Fraser, from how to market a fundraising campaign to her experience working in the media. You probably remember Fraser

from her 15 years on radio with CJAD, CTV, and CBC. Fraser said she is most inspired by the courage of the Leaders

and the children at the hospital, who are "energizer bunnies and just keep going, and make the hospital a joyful place."

On February 28, the Miriam Foundation and the Pacific Autism Family Network (located in Richmond, B.C.) received funding in the amount of \$10.9 million from the federal government to contribute to the Autism-Intellectual Disability National Resource and Exchange Network (AIDE), a new venture of the two organizations. **Warren Greenstone**, president and CEO of the Miriam Foundation, explains that AIDE will offer credible, reliable and evidence-based resources – tailored to impacted Canadian families and individuals (not academics), and available in a curated online library. Funding will support the development and launch of a national program comprised of a national Resource Library, Electronic Asset Maps, and an Online Portal. "AIDE will reduce the disparities that Canadians face across the country and offer equitable access regardless of where you live," said Greenstone. "The exchange of information will build on the touch points of 'intervene early, intervene often, and intervene across the lifespan' and provide Canadians living with autism and intellectual disabilities with opportunities to learn, work and help grow the economy. Most importantly they will have a real and fair chance to succeed and live with dignity."



Wendy Lisogar-Cocchia, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, Warren Greenstone, and Sergio Cocchia.

Approximately 75 youth with special needs from five Montreal-area English school boards attended the My Life, My Path, My PACE conference at Champlain College. The first of its kind in Montreal, students had their own day to learn, exchange ideas, and meet

his love of sports, overcoming disability and fully living his experiences, both

Students enjoy the My Life, My Path, My PACE conference at Champlain College.



new friends. The conference celebrated the 10th anniversary of Adam's PACE, a joint Riverside School Board/Champlain College inclusive college program. Organizers included representatives from Adam's PACE, McGill University, CRISPESH and community members. Gold medal Paralympian **Benoit Huot** delivered an inspirational keynote address, sharing

good and bad. Other workshops were offered throughout the day by Ready, Willing and Able, Spectrum Productions, Avatil, and on the topics of yoga, mindfulness, stress management, and anti-bullying by LOVE. Read more about the conference on our blog: <http://inspirationsnewsmtl.blogspot.ca/>

## Notebook

On March 24, **Andee Goldstein**, dynamic third year dentistry student at Université de Montréal, and over 75 volunteer dental and dental hygiene students and oral health professionals, hosted their first Sharing Smiles Day. The event is spearheaded by Oral Health, Total Health (OHTH), a federal non-profit organization headed up by individual student bodies of Canada's dental faculties. OHTH aims to increase access, advocate, educate and improve oral health care for people with special needs. Sharing Smiles Day also builds community between dental professionals and people with special needs and their families. OHTH Montreal Chair Goldstein and her energetic team animated a fun-filled day, which included oral health-related games, a photo booth, dancing, a delicious lunch, and oral hygiene demonstrations and information dissemination. This group connected

with their guests, sharing their fun and caring side along with their seriousness about oral health. Kudos to Goldstein and team for demystifying the dental experience. Many Montrealers are a little less fearful of their bi-annual visits to the dentist now!



The Sharing Smiles Day organizing committee, with Chair Andee Goldstein seen in the front row (second from the left), at Centre de Loisirs communautaires Lajeunesse in Montreal. (Photo, Stephanie Marcotte)

On April 9, the West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped (WIAIH) welcomed 180 guests to the 40 Westt Steakhouse & Bar in Pointe-Claire for 6 à Huîtres, a cocktail and dinner fundraiser.

Guests were treated to presentations by **Dr. Sazini Nzula**, and **Jeremy Hampson**, vice-president of the Board of Directors of WIAIH from Kaplin Hampson & Associates (Assante Wealth Management). Local star, 14-year-old **Benjamin Seah**, a young violin player who was crowned the winner of Radio-Canada's show *Virtuose* just days before the event, entertained the crowd.

Great-West Life, London Life and Canada Life announced their contribution of \$20,000 to help build the KIZMET Centre.

MP for Lac-Saint-Louis **Francis Scarpaleggia** announced that a \$50,000 accessibility grant from the Economic Development Canada has been awarded to install an elevator at

the new Kizmet Centre. MC'd by **Mike Piperni**, other special guests included **Geoffrey Kelley**, MNA for Jacques-Cartier, and **Natalie Saulnier**, regional vice-president, Eastern Canada of McDonald's Canada.

This fundraiser was part of a series of events in the 2018 McHappy Day campaign. On May 2, six West Island McDonald's restaurants gave one dollar for every Happy Meal purchased.



Pierre Fréreau, Francis Scarpaleggia, and Lyne Charlebois at 40 Westt. (Photo, Christine Scholes)

The Social Tree Foundation was founded by **Francesca Dansereau**, with the support of **Brian Olton**, **Patricia Lucarelli** and past executive member **Charlie Arciresi**, to support the quality of life and career development of people with autism without intellectual impairment (also referred to as "high-functioning"), and foster their independence, autonomy and individualized success. This one stop shop centre of excellence will provide all the necessary support to succeed throughout the life span, from speech and occupational therapy, psychology, psychiatry, and behavioural resources including RDI therapy, to vocational counselling, work placement and life coaching. On March 13, The Social Tree team held their first fundraiser at Restaurant Il Bocallini in Ville St. Laurent. While the elegant dining experience was divine, the educational programming was the highlight of this event. CJAD newscaster **Luciano Pipia** acted as

MC, Dansereau shared her vision and mission, and a panel of parents opened their hearts to share their experiences. The event raised over \$4,000, which will partially fund the Social Tree's conference: "Quality of life among individuals with autism across their life span", which took place at McGill University in April. For information on The Social Tree, visit [www.thesocialtreeautism.org](http://www.thesocialtreeautism.org).



Francesca Dansereau, Brian Olton, and Patricia Lucarelli at The Social Tree fundraising dinner at Restaurant Il Bocallini in Ville St. Laurent.

Manulife Securities in support of Autism Speaks Canada – Montreal presented *Beyond the diagnosis: Autism across the life span* on March 20. This seminar provided parents and caregivers of people with autism information about housing concerns, sleep disorders, self-care, and financial planning for the future. Speakers included **Vânia Aguiar**, fashion blogger and president of La Fondation Les Petits Rois, **Dr. Sazini Nzula**, autism consultant and author of *Beautiful Inside and Out*; **Dr. Roger Godbout**, psychologist and research specialist on sleep and insomnia; and **Nathan Leibowitz**, senior investment advisor, Manulife Securities.



Krista Leitham, Nathan Leibowitz, Marla Vineberg, and Dr. Sazini Nzula at *Beyond the diagnosis: Autism across the life span* at the Atwater Library.

A mother of two sons with autism, Dr. Nzula spoke about the importance of self-care. She stressed, "When a parent takes the time to care for themselves, the child with autism does better. It is important to help your kids, but not at every cost. The window of opportunity for growth will not shut if you need to take a break to care for yourself." Tips imparted included: Know your stresses and manage them; develop a personalized self-care plan; schedule self-care; stick to your plan.



# Étudier en médecine avec une limitation visuelle, c'est possible!

Par Laurène Souchet

Romina Hassid de l'Université de Sherbrooke a reçu une bourse d'une valeur de 3 000 \$ d'INCA en 2016 qui l'a aidée à financer ses études et les manuels demandés dans son domaine. Les bourses d'INCA sont décernées à des élèves aveugles ou ayant une vision partielle qui font preuve de passion, de détermination et de courage en ce qui concerne leur autonomie et leur avenir.

Étudiante en sciences biologiques lorsqu'elle a demandé la bourse, Romina a depuis pu réaliser son rêve en poursuivant des études de médecine. « Pour moi, ça a toujours été la médecine », affirme cette étudiante passionnée et brillante originaire d'Argentine. « C'est un domaine vaste, intéressant et qui me permettra d'aider les gens », répond-elle. Après ses études, Romina souhaite devenir pédiatre urgentologue.

Romina vit depuis sa naissance avec une perte de vision. Au Canada, les médecins ont posé un diagnostic d'albinisme oculocutané et de syndrome d'Axenfeld-Rieger, bien différent du diagnostic obtenu en Argentine. Les spécialistes qu'elle a consultés n'ont jamais pu lui donner une explication uniforme. Romina décrit sa vision comme « une caméra qui aurait moins de pixels ». Elle explique que c'est comme comparer une vieille télé des années 80 à un écran haute définition. Elle voit flou et avec moins de détails, que ce soit de loin ou de près. Cela l'empêche notamment de conduire, de voir au tableau. Pour lire, elle doit utiliser des lunettes et approcher les livres très près.

Dans ses études, Romina est bien soutenue par l'université : elle bénéficie d'une preneuse de notes, de formats agrandis et de temps supplémentaire

pour les examens. Sa perte de vision pose parfois des problèmes pour effectuer des manœuvres ou pour lire les électrocardiogrammes, par exemple, mais Romina est résiliente et trouve toujours des solutions.

Elle souligne qu'elle vit une très bonne expérience, dans un milieu accueillant ou elle ne rencontre aucune discrimination. Ses camarades en médecine sont curieux et lui posent des questions sur sa condition visuelle, et ils sont toujours prêts à la soutenir.

Romina est une étudiante très impliquée. Administratrice au sein de l'association étudiante de son université, elle fait également partie de plusieurs comités à l'IMFSA, l'Association internationale des étudiants en médecine.

« Je suis en médecine, c'est un programme qui demande beaucoup d'efforts, mais j'aimerais faire passer le message que c'est tout à fait possible », note-t-elle. « Je ne suis pas une exception quand il s'agit d'étudier la médecine avec une perte de vision, et je ne veux pas l'être. J'invite les personnes qui sont passionnées par ce domaine à ne pas hésiter à aller en médecine ».



Romina Hassid, étudiante en médecine à l'Université de Sherbrooke qui vit avec une perte de vision, a reçu une bourse INCA pour l'aider à financer ses études.

INCA offre un soutien communautaire, des renseignements et une représentation nationale aux Canadiens aveugles ou ayant une vision partielle. Pour en savoir plus, visitez [inca.ca/quebec](http://inca.ca/quebec) ou composez le 1 800 465-4622.

Laurène est bénévole à INCA Québec à Montréal depuis juillet 2017, où elle est impliquée dans les communications. Elle écrit des articles et fait de la traduction pour INCA.



## Soutien en zoothérapie dans les écoles

Par Audrey Desrosiers

Depuis les dix dernières années, Au bout du Museau oeuvre dans les nombreuses commissions scolaires du Québec. Nous avons désormais une meilleure idée des grandes choses que permettent d'accomplir les interventions zoothérapeutiques.

Qu'il s'agisse de soutien aux groupes spéciaux, classes langage, classes Kangourou, soutien scolaire académique, retard de langage, trouble d'attachement, troubles de comportement, ou tout simplement pour soutenir les apprentissages de l'empathie, d'attendre son tour, les émotions ou les consignes complexes, la zoothérapie fait réellement



Un élève avec Dobby

une différence tant dans la façon dont s'acquièrent les apprentissages que sur la motivation, la généralisation de ces apprentissages et l'impact qu'ils ont. Les ateliers de groupe, de sous-groupe et individuels offrent des résultats tout aussi différents. Il est facile de visualiser les chiens en zoothérapie, mais vous seriez étonnés de voir nos partenaires lapins, hérissons, furets, souris, chats, chinchillas et cochons d'Inde rejoindre les rangs! Nous élaborons des projets spéciaux

et uniques, sur mesure pour certaines écoles.

La seule présence des animaux n'est pas en soi magique. Ce qui est si efficace est la présence de ces partenaires animaliers conjuguée aux spécialisations du zoothérapeute. En plus d'être une profession, la zoothérapie se spécialise selon les clientèles. Identification de notre niveau d'énergie via les comportements de l'animal présent, langage non-verbal et son pouvoir sur les animaux, parcours et consignes longues, dressage et apprentissage de la confiance en soi et exercer son autorité positivement, régulation des émotions et du sensoriel avec l'appui des partenaires présents, ne sont que quelques exemples de ce qui peut être mis en place.

J'ai la chance de compter depuis une dizaine d'années des partenaires fidèles, commissions scolaires et enseignants, psychologues, etc. qui ont fait en sorte que la zoothérapie devienne partie intégrante de leur offre scolaire. La récurrence et l'échelonnement dans le temps sont porteurs de possibilités.

Fort de notre expérience, nous avons réussi à trouver une ferme thérapeutique et à faire équipe avec elle, depuis l'an dernier, pour poursuivre le tout pendant l'été. Une offre réellement significative qui répond aux besoins des jeunes tant au primaire qu'au secondaire.

Nous sommes très reconnaissants de la confiance renouvelée que nous témoignent les diverses écoles, familles et les spécialistes. Nous avons une équipe de partenaires animaliers exceptionnels et une équipe de zoothérapeutes qui ont vraiment à coeur l'évolution des jeunes à leur rythme et à leur façon. Nous répétons sans cesse qu'il existe une porte pour atteindre chaque jeune et que c'est à nous de la trouver.

Audrey Desrosiers est zoothérapeute formée depuis 10 ans, spécialisée auprès des jeunes. Elle enseigne en zoothérapie, est auteure et conférencière en plus d'être coach. Pour plus de renseignements, visitez [www.auboutdumuseau.com](http://www.auboutdumuseau.com) ou [www.fermdadado.com](http://www.fermdadado.com).



# Les Petits Rois et Loto-Québec : Une expérience gagnante pour tous!

Contenu fourni par La Fondation Les Petits Rois et Loto-Québec

Révisé par Wendy Singer



Un premier groupe de participants et d'accompagnateurs marquent le début du projet en posant pour une photo dans le grand hall de Loto-Québec en novembre dernier. (Photo, Loto-Québec)

La Fondation Les Petits Rois et Loto-Québec se sont associées dans le cadre d'un programme novateur d'insertion au travail. En vertu de cette collaboration, 16 jeunes de 21 ans, présentant une déficience intellectuelle modérée à sévère, avec ou sans troubles du spectre de l'autisme, réalisent présentement un stage au sein de la société d'État en vue d'améliorer leur employabilité. Grâce à cette entente de 5 ans qui a commencé le 6 novembre 2017, ils se familiariseront avec le milieu du travail en étant constamment accompagnés d'un professionnel.

## À propos de la Fondation Les Petits Rois

Cette Fondation vient en aide aux familles qui ont un enfant atteint d'une déficience intellectuelle. Vânia Aguiar, mère d'un garçon atteint de déficience intellectuelle, cherchait de l'aide pour répondre à la condition particulière de son enfant. Constatant rapidement le manque de ressources dans ce domaine, elle décida de créer La Fondation Les Petits Rois. Depuis maintenant 15 ans,

la Fondation a pour mission de faciliter l'éducation ainsi que le développement des enfants et des jeunes adultes ayant une déficience intellectuelle. La Fondation soutient les institutions scolaires qui requièrent des services spécialisés pour répondre aux besoins de ces jeunes. Elle soutient également les jeunes adultes âgés de 21 ans ou plus afin qu'ils ne perdent pas leurs acquis et pour qu'ils poursuivent leur apprentissage lorsqu'ils quittent l'école.

Il s'agit pour l'organisme d'une quatrième initiative du genre, qui fait suite à des projets menés avec le détaillant Le Château, le Musée des beaux-arts de Montréal et le Cirque du Soleil. En tout, 17 personnes ont pu acquérir une expérience professionnelle stimulante, encadrée et sécuritaire.

## En quoi consiste le projet?

Le projet de partenariat vise à soutenir 16 jeunes adultes dans leur cheminement vers la croissance et l'indépendance, tout en favorisant leur autonomie et leur inclusion dans la société. Depuis le mois

de novembre, Loto-Québec accueille de jeunes adultes en stage-études au siège social et, depuis janvier, au Casino de Montréal.

À partir de septembre, ces jeunes stagiaires ont suivi une formation au Centre Champagnat en vue de développer des habiletés qu'ils ont pu mettre en pratique dès leur arrivée à Loto-Québec et au Casino de Montréal. Le Centre Champagnat offre un programme de formations spécialisées pour les personnes de 21 ans ou plus atteintes d'une déficience intellectuelle.

## Une initiative louable!

Nombreux sont les effets positifs de ce partenariat. L'initiative favorise un rayonnement positif pour Loto-Québec sur le plan sociétal et démontre une ouverture de la part de l'entreprise, sans compter que la présence de ces jeunes est une source d'inspiration pour tous.

« Lorsque le projet de partenariat avec la Fondation Les Petits Rois nous a été présenté, mes collègues de la haute direction et moi avons été touchés et immédiatement conquis. Ce projet, qui est une première tant pour Loto-Québec que pour la Fondation, nous permet d'améliorer la vie de ces jeunes et de leur famille en contribuant à leur développement de même qu'au maintien de leurs acquis et, surtout, en favorisant leur inclusion dans la société », déclare Guylaine Rioux, vice-présidente corporative au jeu responsable, aux communications et à l'engagement sociétal.

## Après plusieurs mois parmi nous, ils vont bien!

Depuis leur arrivée en novembre dernier, tout se déroule très bien pour les Petits Rois. Ils sont fiers de se rendre au travail et de s'acquitter des tâches qui leur ont été confiées. Si leur adaptation s'est si bien déroulée, c'est grâce à une équipe d'employés bénévoles de la Direction corporative de la sécurité et de la prévention qui s'est assurée de faciliter leur intégration en organisant une journée d'accueil, en établissant un plan de repérage sur les étages, en préparant un plan d'évacuation en cas d'urgence et en trouvant des activités d'intégration.

Pour plus de détails, visitez le <http://www.petitsrois.org/>

## La petite histoire

C'est grâce à l'initiative personnelle d'un employé de Loto-Québec que tout a commencé.

Fabrice Briatte, conseiller en marketing et en expérience client, est le papa d'Océane, atteinte de déficience intellectuelle.

« Avoir un enfant, ça change un quotidien, mais lorsque trois mois après la naissance nous apprenons que cet enfant sera différent, c'est un très gros bouleversement dans une vie! », explique Fabrice.

« Aujourd'hui, Océane a neuf ans et a la chance de fréquenter une école soutenue par la Fondation Les Petits Rois. » C'est à la suite de sa rencontre avec Vânia Aguiar, présidente de la Fondation, que Fabrice a proposé à Loto-Québec l'idée de contribuer au succès de cet organisme en créant un projet de stage-études. Le projet a été bien accueilli par le conseil de direction et a fait boule de neige!



Fabrice Briatte, conseiller en marketing et en expérience client à Loto-Québec, et sa fille Océane.

(Photo, Maxime Gousse, [www.maximegoussephoto.com](http://www.maximegoussephoto.com))



## New Mackay Centre School construction underway

By Wendy Singer



The new Mackay Centre School construction project is 60 percent complete.

A state-of-the-art facility for the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools is being built on land located on Terbonne Street, between Benny and Madison Avenues, in NDG. The English Montreal School Board (EMSB) has owned the green space for decades.

As of April 25, construction was approximately 60 percent complete, with the heaviest work completed. The construction remains on schedule for a delivery date for the middle of August. Highly anticipated visits with the staff began on April 30.

The new school will house approximately 170 students with physical, au-

ditory and visual impairments as well as students with communication disorders and many other disorders or organic impairments, and will be the only one of its kind to offer specialized educational and rehabilitative services for the Anglophone community. Its supra-regional mandate means that students from Quebec English School Boards can attend this school. Some students must travel as much as three hours per day by school bus.

The facility has been carefully designed to cater to the diverse needs of its student population. On the ground floor, numerous specialized classrooms, washrooms, an outdoor yard and a closed in courtyard with an inclusive and accessible playground, as well as an indoor therapeutic swimming pool are just some of the standard facilities planned. The second floor will accommodate the school and rehab administration as well as equipment for medical professionals, a loft for teaching activities of daily living, a snoezelen room, a physio and OT gym, classrooms for the visually impaired, a music therapy room and computer labs. There will be nursing stations and gavage rooms on every floor, as well as adapted washrooms. —\*—

## Dynamic Funds Teacher Team of Inspiration celebrated at Yaldei



Inspirations visited the Donald Berman Yaldei Development Centre on Valentine's Day to honour their teacher team with the Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration 2018 award. The team celebrated their incredible work and the growth of Yaldei since they moved into their new building on Van

Horne in Montreal. Risa Plotnick, director of Rehabilitation and School Services at Yaldei, commended the teacher team for their outstanding work, stating, "We all knew how amazing you were before this award. Now the whole city knows!" If you have a Teacher of Inspiration to nominate, let us know at [wendyinspirations@gmail.com](mailto:wendyinspirations@gmail.com).

# INSPIRATIONS

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Celebrating inclusive communities



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## Our team is growing!

This year, two talented women have joined our team. It is our pleasure to introduce them to you.



### Fay Schipper

Fay worked as the volunteer coordinator at the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre for 20 years, and a counseling psychologist for 11 years. She holds a M. Ed., in Counseling, and a B.A. in Psychology. With her stellar qualifications, and immense knowledge of the special needs community, we consider ourselves fortunate to have her join the *Inspirations* team as Volunteer Database Consultant. Fay has taken on this important dossier with great devotion as she revises, revamps and keeps it current. She provided us with much insight into the community, approaching her work with compassion and wit. For example, she planted the seed for our updated logo design. If you would like to add a resource to the database, or make a correction, contact Fay at [fayschipper@gmail.com](mailto:fayschipper@gmail.com).



### Cindy Davis

Cindy comes to *Inspirations* with a strong background in journalism, communications, programming and marketing. She has a B.A. in Industrial Relations from McGill University and a Graduate Diploma in Journalism from Concordia. She has worked in various newsrooms and was most recently manager of public relations and social media at the Jewish Public Library for many years, making her a perfect fit for the position of Assistant Managing Editor of *Inspirations*. A friend to *Inspirations* for many years, you may recognize her name from her many contributions to our editions, including the prominent Dynamic Funds Caregiver and Teacher of Inspiration features. Cindy also works as a content creator and public relations specialist for JEM Workshop and other organizations and has a monthly column in the *Canadian Jewish News*. She and her husband David are the proud (and busy) parents of two boys, ages eight and 10.



# World change warrior Spencer West motivated Vincent Massey students before WE Day

By Wendy Singer

Toronto-based Spencer West, author and motivational speaker for WE.org, spoke with *Inspirations'* Managing Editor Wendy Singer after an assembly at Vincent Massey Collegiate (VMC) of the English Montreal School Board. Both of West's legs were amputated at the age of five due to sacral agenesis, a rare genetic disorder.

**Q:** How do you manage people's initial reaction to the fact that you do not have legs?

**A:** People tend to see the disability first, and the person afterwards. I am as guilty of that as anyone else. It is frustrating, so I like to address the elephant in the room and get the awkwardness out of the way. My name is Spencer. I'm a son, uncle.... and I also don't have any legs, and we can talk about that.

**Q:** What was your prognosis?

**A:** We were told I'd never sit up by myself, walk, be a functioning member of society, and I'd lead an uninspired life. My parents refused to believe that, and taught me to focus on the things I could do.

**Q:** Has education influenced your life?

**A:** Absolutely. All that I learnt has prepared me for what I do now. I was a good student, but my teachers said I talked too much. I discovered that my gift is my voice. Now I use it to influence change.

**Q:** You said you live your life with purpose. How do you do that?

**A:** When I lived in Phoenix I had all the things that society says make you happy, but I wasn't. I was looking for a good job where I could make the world a better place. I had to take a risk to make the change. Ten years ago, I volunteered on a ME to WE trip to Kenya. I'm now a motivational speaker with WE.

**Q:** What cause are you fighting for?

**A:** We have clean water here, and access to good education. Kids in Africa must

walk many kilometers daily for both. The key to breaking the chain of poverty is education. To implement change, my friends and I started Redefine Possible and climbed Mount Kilimanjaro to raise money for clean water in Africa. We walked 300 kilometers from Edmonton to Calgary with our We Walk for Water campaign. I also opened Demi Lovato's concerts for one year!

**Q:** Tell us your greatest challenge while trekking up Mount Kilimanjaro.

when they developed altitude sickness near the peak. It was the only time in my life I wished I'd had legs so I could carry them.

**Q:** What did you say when you reached the summit?

**A:** This is for every kid who has been bullied, has a disability and felt like they didn't belong, or felt they couldn't change the world. I was told that I would never walk and I'm at the top of the highest freestanding mountain in Africa.

**Q:** Do you advocate for disability rights?

**A:** I'm starting to learn where my place is in regards to the disability movement and I'm still trying to figure out how I exercise that at the same time as advocating for social justice.

**Q:** What is your advice to those that want to implement change?

**A:** Three steps: Find your voice - what you love to do. Find your team who supports you. Find something worth fighting for - animal rights, the environment, the LGBTQ community, breaking the cycle of poverty.

Check out Spencer West's YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/Spencer2TheWest>. For information about WE, visit [we.org](http://we.org).

WE is a movement for schools, companies and families that brings people together and gives them the tools to change the world. WE makes doing good, doable.



Spencer West with students at Vincent Massey Collegiate.

**A:** I trained for one year thinking that the trek would be 80 percent in my chair and 20 percent by hand. On day one we realized it would be the other way around. We panicked. They carried me when I couldn't go on, or pushed my chair. I knew I'd need help. What I didn't know was how I'd need to support my friends

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## Rick Hansen Foundation School Program sets positive tone for students to emulate

By Elaine Cohen



The Rick Hansen Foundation Youth Summit last May drew splendid support from students. (Photo, Rick Hansen Foundation)

date, Aunos was promoted to department director.

Aunos is especially proud of her seven-year-old son, who values accessibility and inclusion. "Thomas doesn't dwell on problems, he sees solutions," she says, observing how the Grade 2 student uses Lego blocks to simulate adapted habitats.

A few years ago, Aunos, along with nine others with varied disabilities, engaged in a two-day training course in Montreal to become Ambassadors as part of the Rick Hansen Foundation School Program (RHFSP). Ambassadors are a dynamic group of people with disabilities across Canada. They share personal stories of

living with a disability. They address the importance of inclusion and the need for improved accessibility. Ambassador presentations, in addition to RHFSP lessons and interactive educational tools, help actively raise awareness about the potential of people with disabilities.

As an RHF Ambassador, Aunos has addressed students in all grades and air cadet groups in Montreal and surrounding regions. Presentations are adapted according to age and Aunos witnesses an immediate impact. When accompanying Aunos back to her car, the youth comment on hurdles they had never noticed before, such as holes in the sidewalk.

"When we talk to children we have a responsibility," she explains. "They're our future and they need to be aware of how accessibility can make it easier for people to be autonomous and contribute to society."

At age 15, Rick Hansen sustained a spi-

nal cord injury in a truck accident in his home province of British Columbia. Inspired by the belief that anything is possible, Hansen began the Man in Motion World Tour in 1985 at age 27, wheeling 40,000km over two years. The Rick Hansen Foundation, established in 1988, has raised awareness and removed barriers for people with disabilities, and funded research for the cure and care of people with spinal cord injuries. Today, the Foundation focuses on improving accessibility and inclusion in all the places where we live, work, play, and learn.

Rick's commitment to youth stems from the profound impact teachers, mentors, and coaches had in encouraging him to follow his dreams. RHFSP builds on Rick's legacy. RHFSP educational materials teach youth about disability, accessibility, and inclusion, and empower them to become a new generation of leaders. Since its launch in Quebec almost three years ago, interest in RHFSP has grown, observes Regional Coordinator Jessica Patterson.

For information on RHFSP and free resources for administrators and educators, visit [www.rickhansen.com/schools](http://www.rickhansen.com/schools)



## Training teaches bus drivers how to interact with people with autism

By Nick Katalifos

The challenges faced by families dealing with autism continue to be documented in a wide variety of scholarly studies and respected publications such as *Inspirations*. In the Spring / Summer 2016 edition, *Inspirations* reported on the Autism Inclusive Cities Project implemented in the City of Laval. The successful collaboration, organized by Giant Steps and financed by a grant from Autism Speaks Canada, led to several important initiatives including the creation of a professional on-line training program that is now being utilized by several key police forces in Canada.

The Giant Steps School and Resource Centre's efforts to reach out into the com-

munity continue to expand. In March, we received a welcomed boost with the announcement of a \$15,000 grant for a special project that is similar in principle to the on-line training program for the police, awarded by the La Capitale Financial Group Foundation. The grant is one of three newly-established ShineBEYOND prizes that are part of an initiative that aims to support the foundation's select-

ed causes: autism, intellectual disability, and vulnerable seniors. According to the chairman of La Capitale, Mr. Jean St. Gelais, the foundation's intention is to "highlight the value of acceptance, support, respect and inclusion of these groups in society." These values are at the core of a highly successful corporate leader that has existed in Canada since 1940, is made up of nearly 3,000 employees, and whose assets are valued at \$5.8 billion.

The project that was awarded a ShineBEYOND prize in the autism category focuses on the sensitization and training of bus drivers. Parents of children living with autism can certainly attest to the concerns they share regarding the transportation of their kids on school buses and city buses due to their sensory and communications difficulties. These challenges often

cause severe anxiety and reactions that can take a great deal of time to alleviate and yet, transportation services are a critical issue for these families.

The professionals who operate these and their employers have routinely commented on the need for information and training as the number of children diagnosed with autism have risen (one in 68 receive the diagnosis). The question of best practices is critical when considering the security of children on our buses. This project will sensitize bus drivers through a series of professionally developed training videos and instruction materials designed to teach how to interact with children with autism. Ultimately, the project aims to assist our drivers while improving upon safety and the overall experience of autistic children on our buses.

The project should be completed and ready for the 2018-2019 academic year.

Nick Katalifos is the principal of Roslyn Elementary School, the chairman of Giant Steps School and Resource Centre, a member of the TACC Steering Committee, and special advisor to *Inspirations*. ❀



Thomas Henderson and Tracy Pennimpepe accept the ShineBEYOND grant from the La Capitale Financial Group Foundation.

## Best Buddies program benefits participants at JGHS and Marianopolis College

By Elaine Cohen

Students in the Autonomy Preparation Program (APP) at EMSB's John Grant High School (JGHS) have discovered the joy of making new friends and gaining self-esteem through being paired with peer buddies at Marianopolis College.

Best Buddies is a global volunteer movement that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

APP teachers Tanya Yankowsky and Carla Toffoli consider JGHS' link with Best Buddies Canada a perfect match and a stellar resource for promoting inclusiveness. "Some APP students have been at our school since the age of 12," Yankowsky said. "Best Buddies takes them out of their comfort zone and exposes them to a new environment."

Buddies with intellectual and developmental disabilities are paired with peer buddies the same age. Three JGHS students in the Défi (Challenges) program and 15 APP students, accompanied by teachers Toffoli, Yankowsky and childcare worker Patrick Millette, visit Marianopolis twice a month to participate in enlightening activities planned by the chapter leadership.

"We create short profiles so we can pair buddies with peers that share interests and motivate each other," Toffoli pointed out. At Marianopolis, peer buddy applicants submit a character reference and are screened.

At the beginning, some JGHS students were hesitant but now they look forward to every meeting, the teachers noted. Marianopolis Best Buddies student chapter president Melina Thibault observed a similar reaction before meetings got underway but not anymore. In one instance, three buddies from JGHS paired with peer buddies at Marianopolis discovered roots in common and chatted in Farsi. Last term, Best Buddies activity highlights



Best Buddies enjoy each other's company. (Photo, Best Buddies program facilitators)

ranged from decorating pumpkins or holiday cookies to a pizza lunch. Bowling is on the current agenda. The program fosters friendships and buddies may meet for walks, coffee, or movies.

Thibault, a second year honors student in Health Sciences at Marianopolis, had yearned to be a peer buddy since Secondary IV but a chapter never materialized at her high school. "So, I waited until CEGEP and worked with initiators Ramya Panchacharam and Taylor Wasserman to open a chapter at Marianopolis."

For Yankowsky and Toffoli the timing was right. "We had contacted Isabelle Bhola (Senior Manager at Best Buddies Canada) seeking peer buddies to pair with our students," said Toffoli, pleased with how Best Buddies complements APP. JGHS programs are designed to meet the needs of students with intellectual and developmental challenges. The Autonomy Preparation Program prepares 18 to 21-year-olds to make a smooth transition after graduation and thrive as independent, productive members of society.

*Best Buddies organizes activities at elementary, high school as well as college/university levels. Founded by Anthony Kennedy Shriver in 1989, Best Buddies International operates in 50 countries. Best Buddies Canada was incorporated as a registered charity in 1995 and is established in every province. For information, visit [www.bestbuddies.ca](http://www.bestbuddies.ca)*

## Youppi! hangs out with Best Buddies



Martin Braunwell, Youppi!, Philip Paraskevopoulos, Rosemary Sondola enjoy an event with the Habs and Best Buddies at Westmount High School.

Best Buddies has also paired with the Leaders on Wheels at the Mackay Centre School's satellite class at Westmount High School. Last Christmas, they had the treat of a lifetime – a pizza lunch with Habs mascot, Youppi! Clad in his blue, blanc, rouge jersey, Youppi! goofed around with the students as they ate lunch and decorated ornaments for their Christmas tree. The event was initiated by Canadian's defenceman Shea Weber, who became involved with Best Buddies while playing for the Nashville Predators. He has continued his community outreach here in Montreal since his arrival in 2016. Weber could not attend the event due to practice time, but Youppi! stepped right in; his antics making the students laugh heartily. Representatives from the Montreal Canadiens Children's Foundation marketing team Shauna Denis, Vanessa Harrison, and Dave McGinnis, kicked off the celebration on a high note, gifting students with NHL 100th classic tuques, Habs flags and scarves, Youppi! dolls, and two tickets to an upcoming hockey game.



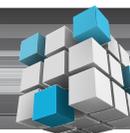
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# Technology Feature



## “NAO” is the time: Exploring the impact of the humanoid robot on elementary students with autism

By Wendy Singer

The English Montreal School Board (EMSB) is introducing a new robotics initiative that will specifically benefit students with special needs. The “NAO” robot project is a collaboration between the EMSB and the team of Dr. Thierry Karsenti from the Université de Montréal, along with the support of the Education and Technology Services and Student Services Departments. NAO is a humanoid robot that is programmed to interact with students in a playful way, creating new pathways to learning.

When asked his purpose, NAO will tell you that humanoid robots are machines that try to help humans with various tasks. He stands nearly two feet high, and has impressive range of movement. His eyes flash blue when he is talking, green when he is processing, and pink when he is processing too much information.

“This is quite a new trend. NAO will give students with special needs a chance to not only interact with a robot, but see how engaged they will be as a result of these interactions,” said Dr. Karsenti, a

specialist in education technology and psychology. “The goal of this program is to collect data so that we can evaluate the impact that NAO will have with these students, and give us a better understanding of how much of an impact a progressive, level-based, mastery-based robot education can have.”

Dr. Karsenti and NAO recently visited two autism classes at Edward Murphy Elementary School in Montreal for the second time. NAO spent 15 minutes one-on-one with each student involved in the study. Those that had met NAO on his first visit were excited to see him again. It was the first encounter for others. Each session began with an exchange of names (NAO is translated from the Chinese word meaning ‘great’ and the English word ‘now’), and chit chat about the weather and how the student was feeling. When NAO was asked if he was cool, he responded: “I’m as cool as a polar bear’s toenails!”

Making students feel comfortable is key. Before educational content is introduced,

NAO encouraged students to sing and dance the classic *Head and shoulders, knees and toes* with him, or showed off with a relaxing dance or the popular *Macharena*. He’s got the moves!

Dr. Karsenti believes that part of the success of the robot as educator is that they are non-judgemental. Students like that the robot is not perfect. He makes mistakes and will sometimes not answer. “They seem interested in the moments where he does not respond,” says Karsenti. NAO is also small, and that helps students feel empowered and in control. They are able to touch him gently.



NAO and Adamo interact at Edward Murphy Elementary School.

Sessions included counting the dots on large, colourful die or playing soccer. At the end of each visit, NAO introduced the book *Dragons Love Tacos* by Adam Rubin. Teachers will read it in class prior to NAO’s next visit, which will focus on the book. Dr. Karsenti will also introduce an app to help with math. In the interim, NAO will send short video messages to keep in touch with the students.

This type of interaction with robots is common in clinics, but not in schools. “Within the school setting we can focus on skills they’re learning at school

– reading, writing, math, social interaction,” says Dr. Karsenti. “Because we’re connecting with the teachers, leaving a book for them to read, keeping a learning thread going throughout the school year on an almost daily basis, we can look at how robots impact how kids learn and go beyond the sessions to see if the robot has an impact when he’s not there, too.”

Dr. Karsenti and the Edward Murphy staff are anxious to see what develops over the course of the study.



## RoboCup International in Montreal this June

By Sara Iatauro



RoboCup is an educational student initiative with an international community that fosters talent in fully autonomous robotics, machine

learning and programming languages encompassing all subjects of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Mathematics). The English Montreal

School Board will be playing a prominent role in this robotics event as a major event partner. Montreal will host this prestigious event from June 18 to 22 at the Palais des congrès de Montréal. At the 22nd RoboCup International competition, visitors can witness robots that are 100 percent programmable working in the home environment, in the workplace, playing soccer on artificial turf, helping in rescue missions, performing on stage, assisting in a manufacturing industry and even in a restaurant. Participating projects at RoboCup are developed by learners from age 11 to Post-Doctoral students.

In conjunction with the competitions, an Innovation Summit with international

and local experts in the field of robotics, artificial intelligence and machine learning is open to the general public. Top professionals will share their expertise to help train, develop and build our local robot enthusiasts. The Symposium will be held on June 22 with the top Canadian AI Scientist, Professor Yoshua Bengio.

For information about RoboCup International, to purchase tickets, join an Innovation Summit workshop or register for the conference, visit <http://www.robocup2018.org/>



# Technology Feature



## Virtual Reality brings a world of possibilities

By Joanne Charron

Virtual Reality (VR) is allowing people with special needs to break through their barriers and experience the world in ways that were never possible. It is providing limitless accessibility.

As parents, caregivers and educators, we try to provide our children and students with as many experiences as possible and expose them to new things. When mobility is limited, so are these experiences.

With the arrival of VR glasses, we are able to bring a whole new world to our children and students. We can enhance their experiences in a holistic way that involves all of their senses. VR is provid-

ing them with the opportunity to virtually go places they could never imagine going to before, and would not have been physically able to!

Imagine going to the moon, being on a roller coaster, visiting other countries, sailing on a boat in the middle of the sea, or piloting a plane! Imagine creating artwork that you are able to be in the middle of and see it from all angles, and to be able to make changes to it with one movement. Imagine being inside a math equation or in a skyscraper you are building.

The look of wonder on a child's face as you watch them go through the VR world is out of this world. The virtual experi-

ences benefit them in immeasurable ways, giving our children mobility of their mind and the opportunity to see and exercise their own potential.

What is most amazing about the VR experience is that children are in control; something they are not often able to experience. They are able to create in ways that they could not before.

Imagine the possibilities for the future. Perhaps a virtual reality school where students are creators of their own education? Therapy could be interactive with an immediate cause and effect, giving them instant feedback in meeting their goals. Imagine what they could teach us.

That future is now and we are living in it. The only limit is our own imagination.

Let's take the leap into the virtual world. See you there!

Joanne Charron is the EMSB's parent



Niko experiences the virtual world at Mackay Centre School's satellite class at Westmount High School.

commissioner for ACSES (Advisory Committee for Special Education Services), and special advisor to Inspirations. —\*—

## Robotics: A learning tool to drive pedagogical practices and digital confidence

By Sara Iatauro

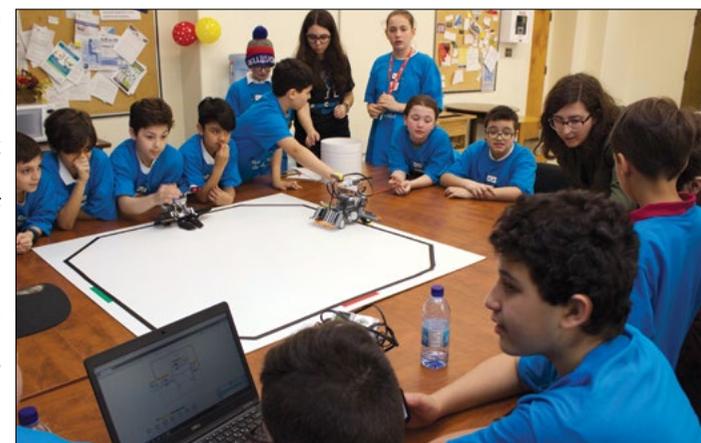
The Québec Education Program places the onus on schools to provide students with an educational environment to meet their interests, aptitudes and needs, by differentiating instruction and offering a broad range of educational options. The opportunity for our students with any need to further develop their language arts, numerical thinking, discovery of technological solutions and various materials through a robotics program has been well founded and very well received at English Montreal School Board schools. With the guidance of our Educational Consultant in Robotics, our stakeholders, as well as great support from our directors, our schools have been equipped with the necessary resources

to offer students an educational robotics experience.

The Robotics programs provide teachers and students the opportunity to further their knowledge in the fields of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math), and always provide opportunities to cooperate with their peers. Through project-based learning, students learn how to read code, understand how the commands are generated, and how a robot can execute the command. Such tasks require students to use skills in numerical thinking, language art capabilities, science and technology ideas, mathematics and creative reasoning ideas, in an innovative and hands-on manner.

The Lego Education robotics uses image block programming code, which is advantageous as it can provide basic understanding of concepts in coding, as well as very advanced coding concepts. The Arduino Microcontroller electronic board and coding programming language allows students to create custom-made electronic devices, interactive games and furniture, LED machine displays and signs, automated systems, etc. that we can enjoy in our everyday world.

We would like to thank Brault & Bouthillier for their onsite and long-term teacher training resources in robotics education. Their extensive pedagogical school robotics programs have allowed



Students having a discussion on the rules and strategies they created before their cooperative competition game begins with their opponents.

RoboCupJunior initiatives to grow since 2002.

Sara Iatauro is an educational consultant with the Education and Technology Services Department at the EMSB. Her dossiers include Science and Technology at the elementary level, STEAM, and Robotics from K to 11. She is also the General Chair of RoboCup International in Montreal. \*—



## Arts &amp; Entertainment

# Sharing Music Unites Us™: Artist JAYE is empowering special needs children

By Martin C. Barry

Emilio Gamboa Leon has autism and is legally blind, and is learning to play the guitar better than most children his age. In fact, since deciding to take up the instrument, music has become the 14-year-old's greatest passion and the most empowering influence in his life.

It was around a year ago that Emilio's music instructor – guitar teacher and musicologist Artist JAYE, one of Canada's leading guitar coaches – presented Emilio with an electric guitar of his own. Like all the children who receive support from Sharing Music Unites Us™ (Artist JAYE's cause), Emilio is coached free of charge.

Prior to a recent interview with *Inspirations* at Artist JAYE's studio, Emilio performed *Little Wing*, a fairly complex rhythm and blues-inspired piece written by legendary rock guitarist Jimi Hendrix. "Most kids Emilio's age who don't face the challenges he faces would have problems playing this song," says JAYE, noting that *Little Wing* normally requires a skill set that is much more advanced. "He's able to pull it off in spite of his disabili-

ties," he continues. "These kinds of disabilities are not limiting if you have the right coaching and a love for the music. Whether somebody has a disability or not, you can benefit from music."

Through the Sharing Music Unites Us™ cause, which Artist JAYE founded five years ago, he's been donating musical instruments as well as music lessons to children facing severe life challenges. His philosophy as a teacher of music is relatively simple. "I use my talents to be of service to others," he says.

He believes that music delivered straight from the heart offers the children in his program something to smile about. At the same time, he also believes this contributes immensely to their self-empowerment. "We are trying to empower through music," says JAYE. "It gives them something positive in their lives."

In addition to these aspects, he points out that music also generates some more direct benefits. "It helps develop their hand-eye coordination, their concentration levels," he says. "It works on their



Artist JAYE, seen here with Emilio Gamboa Leon, who is one of his students in the Sharing Music Unites Us™ program, believes in the empowerment of special needs kids through music.

memory. It works on their sense of creativity. In today's world, we have less and less possibilities to be creative and to utilize that aspect of our selves."

JAYE feels that his cause can make an especially positive impact in Montreal's special needs community by drawing out previously hidden musical talents and providing special needs children with musical tools for a lifetime. It certainly put a smile on Emilio's face, while bringing joy to Ruben Gamboa and Karla Leon

who are Emilio's parents.

"We were very fortunate to have met Artist JAYE, and everything he does with his Sharing Music Unites Us™ cause is really good for kids," says Ruben. "We want people to know that this is a really valuable program for children."

For information on the Sharing Music Unites Us™ program, and private lessons with JAYE, visit [www.ArtistJAYE.com](http://www.ArtistJAYE.com).



## JEM hosts *Life, Animated* evening

By Cindy Davis

Guests were treated to a screening of the Oscar-nominated documentary *Life, Animated* on April 19 at Cinémas

Guzzo Mégaplex Sphèretch 14 in Saint Laurent. The powerful film, based on the book by Pulitzer prize-winning author and journalist Ron Suskind, chronicles his son Owen's journey with autism and how the family learned to connect with him through classic Disney films. Ron Suskind, who was flown in for the event, met with guests at a cocktail party before the screening and spoke to the crowd and answered questions following the film. The event was a fund-

raiser and outreach engagement for JEM Workshop, an organization and packaging company that employs individuals with emotional, intellectual, and/or

physical disabilities, and helps them to lead productive and fulfilling lives. For more information on JEM Workshop visit [www.jemworkshop.org](http://www.jemworkshop.org) ✨



Ron Suskind, sixth from left, surrounded by JEM Workshop Board members. (Photo, Avi Charszan)



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Arts continued...

## Autism and Arts in the Laurentians

By Julie Chou-Lachapelle

If you visit Laurentian Regional High School (LRHS) in Lachute, Quebec, on a Wednesday after school, you might hear a spontaneous cry of "POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE!" in the hallways. But it isn't the basketball or football teams shouting this out. It's actually coming from a group of students with autism that meet regularly at the school and the inside joke - the origins of which are a hotly debated topic - has become somewhat of a motto. The group is called "Autism and Arts in the Laurentians" (AAL) and this social club is the first of its kind in the region.

While autism-specific services are available in the Laurentians, a diverse region which covers 22,000 square kilometers north of Montreal, services are limited in the English language, if offered at all. And despite the Laurentians' renown reputation as a natural paradise, the region's six and a half percent English-speaking population (2011 Census) is simply too small to attract therapists and service providers for this demographic. Luckily, the Laurentian Regional Community Learning Center (CLC) is working to change that.

"We recognized the need for social and recreational services for Anglophone teenagers and young adults on the autism spectrum. Beyond the school day, there were no specific programs or services available to this community unless individuals traveled an hour or more away," says Melanie Bujold, the CLC agent based out of LRHS who initiated the program. With the support of volunteers, the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, 4Korners Family Resource Center, the local CIUSSS and the LRHS community, the AAL program was created to fill this service void. It has been a tremendous success so far.

Primarily an art program, the group meets weekly to work on specific proj-



The group from Autism and Arts in the Laurentians. (Photo, Daphne Petersen)

ects. Creative expression is encouraged in many different mediums. While sculpting, painting, discussions on storylines, stop-motion and live action filming, participants and volunteers are developing social skills and friendships in a safe and nurturing environment.

AAL began with a small group of participants, and is growing as word of the program spreads. The group is almost evenly split between girls and boys, which pleasantly surprised AAL's organizers as prevalence of autism is currently higher in males. Most participants and their families reported not knowing any other autism families and had not taken part in any autism-specific activities before. The AAL program has become a support network for these families and hopefully in time, more services in the Laurentians will emerge.

AAL was recently awarded a Family Services Community Grant from Autism Speaks Canada. With this funding, the group is planning many new and exciting activities and outreach to raise understanding, acceptance and inclusion of people with autism in the Laurentians.

For information, contact Melanie Bujold at [mbujold@swlauriersb.qc.ca](mailto:mbujold@swlauriersb.qc.ca), (450) 562-8571 #8449 or visit AAL's Facebook page.

Julie Chou-Lachapelle is a mother of two and a passionate volunteer in the special needs community. —\*—

## All Access Life: New one-stop shop website specializes in accessibility

By Fay Schipper

An exciting new website, All Access Life, has been launched in the technology world. The site serves as the only one-stop shop for all of your accessibility needs by addressing several disabilities at the same time, such as cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, autism, visual and hearing impairments, physical disabilities, and the elderly.

In addition to presenting current and new technology, gadgets, and apps for each of the above-mentioned categories, All Access Life focuses on general accessibility with the objective of making your life not only easier but also safer. One goal of the website is to have a sense of community and to allow its members to share unique setups, suggestions and tips to help others try new technology. Membership is free.

The brains behind this website are Bradley Heaven and his aide Dan O'Connor. Heaven is a social science student at Dawson College and has spastic cerebral palsy. He cannot control his muscles and is unable to verbally communicate.

In November 2017, Dawson held its annual competition, Entrepreneurship Week (EWeek). Heaven and O'Connor decided to enter the competition with their website and won the top prize of \$1,000.00. In addition, a new prize of \$250.00, offered by the newly created Dawson College Office of Sustainability, was awarded this year for the most sustainable project. It was a clean sweep for this team. Shortly after EWeek, they launched their website.

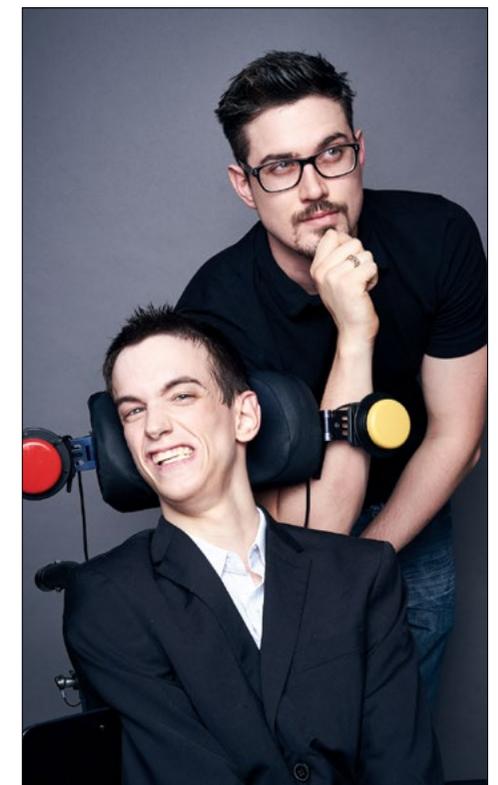
The team has a YouTube channel and an Instagram account. Other projects in the works include a Shopify online store where they will be selling their own products. They are constantly thinking of ways to educate people on Smart Technology and showcase how useful and life changing this era of technology is, not only for people with disabilities, but for everyone.

Today the world of accessibility is sky-

rocketing. It is impossible for the average person to keep up. Well-known companies are jumping on the accessibility wagon and making their products more accessible. This is what led this team to give birth to their website, [allaccesslife.org](http://allaccesslife.org).

"We want our site to become the face of accessibility," says Heaven. "When you think of accessibility, you think about all access life."

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



Bradley Heaven and Dan O'Connor hope their site becomes the face of accessibility. (Photo, Dawson Photography Department)



## Adult students with special needs expand their horizons daily at SWLSB

By Heather Halman,  
B.Com. B.A., M.A., C.E.L.

As an educator and Adult Education Director, it is a pleasure to see our Social Integration Services Program (SIS) continuing to expand in the Laval community. In the short time we have been in operation, our classes have grown to include two full groups of adults with intellectual challenges that are over the age of 21. We are proud of our program, and the community recognizes the value of our efforts and the services that we provide to our 25 clients with special needs.

SIS is a Ministry sanctioned program which seeks to develop life skills competencies in 14 differing areas such as personal health care, financial literacy, communication, nutritional awareness, socialization, technology literacy as well as academic and language skills. Our team of professionals create individualized success plans for each client which support their growth and development.

Recently, we introduced a new program using digital photography as a form of therapy. Students learned the basics of photography with a qualified photographer, and took photos on outings in the community. After the photos were developed, the students mounted them on cards which they sold at the school board offices in Rosemere and to their friends and family members.

This is just a small part of what the students experience in this exceptional

program. We have expanded our curriculum to include the use of SMART boards and iPads. Our students create slideshows and their own movies. They are learning to speak French using Rosetta Stone® and working with a French teacher on a regular basis. Weekly yoga classes have recently been added to help with mobility and the reduction of stress and anxiety.

We are very excited about our newest activity which is an SIS mobile can-

teen. In teams, the students purchase healthy snacks, price them for sale, and visit classes during break times to sell their items to other students and staff members. The focus is on healthy eating, communication and managing money. The students are excited to take on this activity which gives them opportunities to meet new people and develop social skills.

Our goal is to support our adult students to be happy, responsible and productive members of the community. I am proud that our SIS students have the unique opportunities to showcase their talents in the Laval community.

*Heather Halman is the director of Adult Education at the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, serving the Laval, Lanaudiere and des Laurentides communities.*



Students sell snack items from their SIS mobile canteen. (Photo, CDC Vimont)

## SWLSB holds parent conference on the topic of anxiety



Silvia Patella, assistant director, Pedagogical Services, SWLSB, Melissa Simard PhD, SWLSB and clinical psychologist, and Stephane Henley, SEAC chair. (Photo, Valentina Basilicata)

Dozens of parents gathered at the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board (SWLSB) in Rosemere on the evening of February 20 for a conference on anxiety organized by its Special Education Advisory Committee (SEAC). Guest speaker, psychologist Melissa Simard, PhD, defined typical and atypical anxiety while highlighting tips and treatment options for supporting and helping anxious children. The mini conference, the first in a series of three planned for the year, was also available through livestream. SEAC Chair Stephane Henley says anxiety is a widespread concern for families; he was pleased with the turnout. "With this new format, we are trying to reach more parents and give more information." SWLSB's SEAC is composed of parents and school board staff who meet approximately once a month to advise the school board on the allocation of resources and on policies for the organization of educational services to special needs students.

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# T.E.C.C. introduces culinary arts and floral programs

By Wendy Singer

At Summit School's Transitional Education Career Centre (T.E.C.C.), the vocational education options offered are limited only by the creativity and talent of the staff. Students aged 16 to 21 experience a variety of unique programs that provide pre-work certification as part of the Work Orientation Training Program (WOTP).

T.E.C.C.'s floral shop, called TECCFLO-RA, engages students in floriculture and teaches how to create floral arrangements for occasions such as weddings, memorials, and charitable events. The program was inspired by Vicky Surplice, a florist who worked for The Four Seasons Hotel chain across Europe prior to settling in Montreal. Students research the nature of flowers prior to designing and creating arrangements. At the time of my visit, they were constructing a "living wall" for the school.

Chef JJ Heffring brings her experience

working at the St. James Hotel to the T.E.C.C. table every day, leading students in preparing lunch for purchase to students and staff, and anyone lucky enough to visit the school at lunchtime. Chef JJ packed a lunchbox to go for me, filled with the most delicious crispy pretzel-encrusted chicken, a side of fries and sriracha barbecue sauce. What a treat!

Student chefs learn in a professional space that replicates a restaurant kitchen, working under pressure to meet time restrictions and quality and cleanliness standards. They gain experience in working the cash and catering events. Cupcakes, muffins, meals - you name it, they can provide it.

Director of Summit School Herman Erdogmus plans to take these programs further. "Our goal for the future is to open a flower shop and café in the community, staffed by our graduated students," he said.

T.E.C.C. students are succeeding in stages in Montreal kitchens, including Chef On Call, a Parc Avenue delivery and catering service. "It's a good relationship to have as you're introducing them into the workforce and you're able to teach them skills they may not be able to get in a school setting," shared Gabriel Malbog of Chef On Call, in a recent interview with CTV.



Sophia Buckett, Chef JJ Heffring, and Shannon Davis working in the kitchen at T.E.C.C.

Other programs offered at T.E.C.C. include leather working (products created include bowties, mug sleeves, and bound journals that are sold at craft shows), photography, T.E.C.C. Botany, crafting of tuques, cards and organic dog treats, and the longstanding Copy & Print Centre, with Krystal Bailey, that caters to printing needs of schools, including copy books, and the needs of the greater community.

"Our programs are developed from ideas from our staff, and we let them run with it," says Cindy Larson, educational con-

sultant at T.E.C.C. overseeing programming and curriculum. "We are very proud of our students and their willingness to try new things."

The TECC program is currently taking student applications for the upcoming 2018-2019 school year. For more information about the program and/or if you want to support it by having an event catered, order flowers, or use the copy center services, contact Cindy Larson at [clarson@summit-school.com](mailto:clarson@summit-school.com).



## Memories with I Can Dream Theatre

By Steven Atme

Before joining I Can Dream Theatre, I knew its founders Ada Masciarelli, Tricia Bartley and Michele Matthews. We had all met when I was a student at Summit School.

In early 2009, my homeroom teacher at Summit/Westmount High School announced that Summit School was holding auditions for Summit's new production, *The Godfather: A Family Reunion*. I auditioned in Ada's classroom by playing piano, reciting lines and acting. A few days later, I found out that I was accepted, and I landed the role of Dean Martin.

Rehearsals for the play were a lot of work. Memorizing lines, choreography, lyrics, even where to stand and when.

I remember it wasn't easy - making mistakes and getting criticism. I would get angry at myself, but with Ada's tips on acting methods, Trish's advice about getting through rough times, and Michele's help with singing and playing the piano, I got through it.

When the show premiered in May 2010, it was a major success. I had a blast! A couple of months later, I got a message from them asking if I wanted to come back. This time, it was to join their independent theatre group, "I Can Dream Theatre" (ICDT).

From January 2011 until November 2017, I was involved in six productions, participated in their fundraisers, exhibitions, the Autism Speaks Walk and their

first troupe tour last year. Those were the greatest six years ever! Even though I left ICDT, the group is still forever my family. There is no such thing as goodbye, only see you later!

While I no longer perform with ICDT, I am helping them with their upcoming production, *Dead on the Orient Express*, by mentoring performers with music and acting, and counselling them during their rough times. I guess it's my way of giving back. The group has had a major impact on my life because they pushed me to grow and discover talents that I did not know I had. They also helped me grow as a person.

I'm forever grateful for everything they've done for me, especially for supporting me with my independent projects. If there's anyone 18 years and older who wants to showcase their talents and creativity and be part of an amazing family, I personally recommend I Can Dream Theatre. You won't be disappointed! From me to you, get out there, give your personal best, fulfill your dreams and have fun!



Ada Masciarelli, Tricia Bartley, Steven Atme, and Michele Matthews at I Can Dream Theatre. (Photo, Katherine Meyendorff)

Steven Atme is a pianist and composer, gives private piano lessons, teaches music to students at Elizabeth Ballantyne Elementary School, and is a public speaker, enlightening on his experience growing up and living with autism.

The next ICDT show will be staged on November 9 and 10, 2018. For information, visit [www.icandreamtheatre.com](http://www.icandreamtheatre.com). To reach Steven, email at [mepianosphd@hotmail.com](mailto:mepianosphd@hotmail.com). \*

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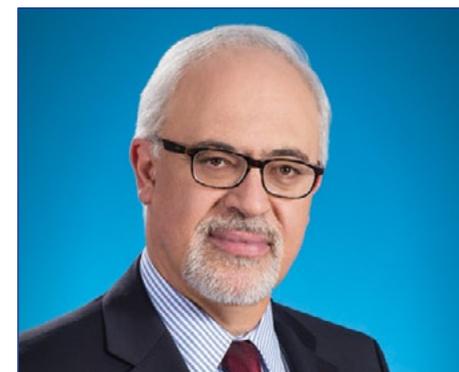


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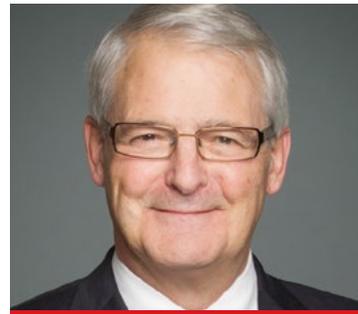
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## YM-YWHA: Respite through the storm

By Atie Waxman

In light of recently announced cuts in services for individuals with disabilities, families are beginning to worry about the isolation they are anticipating in the homes of their loved ones. Although these cuts have temporarily been put on hiatus, the worry is still ever-present.

Julie Longval, coordinator of Special Needs at the Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA, has an interesting perspective from her time working as a Miriam Home Manager of Community Residential Services. She believes that the families who are being affected by these issues are really the families who fought for services to be implemented in the first place.

Parents advocated for their children to have access to vocational and socio-professional services. Over the years, these resources that were fought for by the families became part of the public social service network and they are now seemingly being taken away - like the rug is being pulled out from under the families who got services for their children in the first place.

The Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA Inclusion Services Department has programs designed to be a support for families with this on their minds. Carly Berlin, director of Youth and Family Engagement at the Y states: "At the Y, we do not require any specific assessment, level of functioning,

nor particular diagnosis to access any programs in our Inclusion Services Department - or in any part of the Y, for that matter. We are a community centre that is open to people of all abilities and we are able to accommodate and facilitate integration for those who need it. We are not a day program, but we are a resource to help break isolation for many who could be affected by these cuts. Through our Kouleinu Yachad program, we can organize times for a buddy to accompany a participant to our fitness facilities on their own schedule. We also offer Club Rendez-Vous, a drop-in lunch program twice a week for adults to have the opportunity to socialize and share a meal together. As well, evening art classes can inspire participants and empower them by participating in an end-of-year vernissage. Our Multimedia Club, geared to teenagers and young adults of all abilities, teaches participants the basic elements of blogging, animation, photography, and videography, while also providing



Family Camp 2017 at the Harry Bronfman Y Country Camp.

education in maintaining a safe online presence and how to use personal technology (like smartphones). We can help alleviate the potential for isolation that these cuts in services could bring."

For information, contact Julie Longval, coordinator of the YM-YWHA Special Needs Department at (514) 737-6551, ext 235 or [jlongval@mywya.com](mailto:jlongval@mywya.com)



## CanChild's 'F-words' Knowledge Hub focuses on what youth with special needs 'can' do

By Elaine Cohen

Vasilije Grahovac, 15, is an intelligent, Grade 10 student at Cardinal Newman High School in Hamilton, Ontario. He is a sociable teenager who is eager to engage in sports and other programs outside of school. He loves soccer, horseback riding, table tennis, bowling, swimming and traveling with his family.

Vasilije has cerebral palsy, Level 5 (on the Gross Motor Function Classification System). He is unable to walk, talk, and is "completely dependent," his mother Danijela Grahovac says. However, instead of dwelling on limitations, she takes pride in both of her sons' accomplishments. Vasilije's 19-year-old, brother is studying mechanical engineering at Mohawk College.

Vasilije has obstacles to surmount, so it takes him longer to do things, but he can find a way, his mother observes. He processes information well and responds with a communication device. He uses

a wheelchair, walker, and bike to navigate. Vasilije takes part in soccer practice at Saltfleet Stoney Creek's (SSC's) Special Needs adapted soccer program. He joined in 2010, and has also participated in high school Paralympics.

Vasilije and Danijela's determination reflect the "can do" philosophy of the 'F-words' initiated by CanChild co-founder Dr. Peter Rosenbaum and CanChild director Dr. Jan Willem Gorter. CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research was established in 1989 and is dedicated to transforming the lives of children and adolescents with disabilities. The researchers are professors in the Department of Pediatrics at McMaster University.

In 2012, Dr. Rosenbaum and Dr. Gorter published "The 'F-words' in Childhood Disability: I swear this is how we should think!" The paper features six 'F-words'-Function, Family, Fitness, Fun, Friends,



Vasilije has always welcomed challenges. (Photo, Danijela Grahovac)

and Future. It is built on the World Health Organization's International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health (ICF) framework. The groundbreaking 'F-words' paper has received worldwide recognition and been downloaded over 12,000 times.

Prior to joining the 'F-words' research team, Danijela, who holds an MSc IT engineering degree, conducted research in the Ontario school system on the use of SMART boards for children with special needs. Since 2014, Danijela has played an active role in CanChild's 'F-words' projects, including the development of an online 'F-words' Awareness Video, creating tools such as the

'F-words' Photo Collage. In 2017, the 'F-words' research team (which includes both families and researchers) co-developed and launched the 'F-words' Knowledge Hub ([www.canchild.ca/f-words](http://www.canchild.ca/f-words)), which shares practical tools and resources to help families and service providers implement the 'F-words' in practice.

Danijela has also co-presented on the 'F-words' at multiple conferences and is

currently delivering workshops for service providers in healthcare organizations. She plans to follow suit in schools to inform and engage administrators, educators, students and parents.

"The 'F-words' supports a new way of thinking by concentrating on the whole child, their environment and capacity to do things," Danijela relates. "I have applied the 'F-words' in my son's school and all other areas of his life. It has made our life more enjoyable, reduced stress and now I send my son to school with peace of mind."

For information, visit [www.canchild.ca/f-words](http://www.canchild.ca/f-words)





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## AFB Award winner sheds light on digital accessibility for disabilities

By Elaine Cohen

When Jennison Asuncion accepts the American Foundation for the Blind (AFB) 2018 Stephen Garff Marriott Award this spring, he will be in California. However, Asuncion is bound to reflect on his roots in Montreal.

"I became blind as an infant as a result of optic atrophy," Asuncion said, noting he is a proud white cane user. "My success and outlook wouldn't be possible without my mother and sister's support. Technology was just evolving in the '70s." He studied Braille at the Montreal Association for the Blind, played with a Commodore and his family read back what was on the screen. Asuncion

handed in assignments using a manual typewriter at Elizabeth Ballantyne Elementary School. His computer technology would evolve through his days at Loyola High School.

At Dawson CEGEP, Asuncion met students with diverse disabilities and witnessed the power of technology for them. After graduating from Concordia with a B.A. in political science and a M.A. in Educational Technology, he honed his mettle at IBM and BMO. "I relocated to Toronto, while finishing my Master's but my daytime employment wasn't focused on digital accessibility." After a good run, he stepped back and contemplated his passion before veering into digital accessibility.

In 2006, he joined RBC's IT accessibility team, working with designers, developers, external vendors and others to meet the bank's accessibility standards. In 2013, he relocated to Silicon Valley to take on directing LinkedIn's digital accessibility efforts. "In part, I manage a team of engineers who work with designers, engineers, and others so that our web and mobile apps can be used by everyone. LinkedIn helps professionals con-

nect so that they can be productive and successful."

Asuncion volunteers with non-profit organizations and spearheads events on digital inclusion. He has been co-directing the Dawson College-based Adaptech Research Network since 1999, which examines how IT impacts Canadian college and university students with disabilities. In 2012, he received the prestigious Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. The upcoming AFB Award honours a visually impaired individual, who is an exceptional mentor and a remarkable achiever.

Although Asuncion takes pride in every endeavor, he is especially proud of co-founding Global Accessibility Awareness Day (GAAD) in 2012. "It's held annually the third Thursday in May and we ask people to spend time learning about digital access and inclusion," Asuncion said, adding the idea emanated from Los Angeles-based web developer Joe Devon's blog. "We connected and discovered we're both from Montreal. GAAD began with events in 10 to 12 cities and now it's

taken on a life of its own. Events vary and target the tech community but are open to everyone."

Students with disabilities need their parents and others to give them latitude to explore their own career aspirations, he relates. "If they make a mistake, then they'll realize it's not for them like anyone else."



Jennison Asuncion specializes in digital accessibility for people with disabilities. (Photo, Jennison Asuncion)

## Let's Roll For Kids: Bringing the Montreal community together for children with developmental delays

For the seventh year in a row, families and corporate teams will show their support at the Let's Roll for Kids event on June 10, featuring 50k, 10k and 5k bike-a-thons, 10k and 5k walk-a-thons, and more fun for kids than ever before with games, inflatables, face painting, a magic show, and live entertainment.

On Sunday June 10, families will gather at The Big Top in Verdun (7000, boul. Lasalle) to celebrate the small miracles that make YALDEI such a special place. With the support of the community for this event, children with developmental delays benefit from individualized treatment plans, no-waiting-list policy, and customized education. Kids with autism, Down syndrome, Angelman's syndrome,

cerebral palsy and other conditions are learning skills their parents never dreamed possible, thanks to YALDEI's unique and innovative approach assembling all types of therapists and educators under one roof.

"Cycling 50 kilometres can be a lot of work for a father or mother, but it pales in comparison to the obstacles children at our center face and overcome every day," said Executive Director Menachem Leifer. "We would like the community to join us in telling these children that they are not alone. By walking, biking or simply attending the event with your family, you will help raise funds that enable us to continue providing life-changing therapies for YALDEI's special children."

For information about Let's Roll for Kids, call Suzanne Dalzell at (514) 262-7549. For information about the Donald Berman YALDEI Developmental Center, call (514) 279-3666

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## Specialized adult education programs at the EMSB open doors for students

By Wendy Singer

### Galileo SIS students are growing through Work Integration Program

This year, Galileo Adult Centre in Montreal North launched an innovative work program where Social Integration Services (SIS) and Sociovocational Integration Services (SVIS) students are learning invaluable work skills at school, either one-on-one, in their work skills classroom, or in their individual stages at businesses such as Maxi (Pie-Ix), Home Depot (Anjou), Canadian Tire (Henri Bourassa), and Shell (Pie IX).

After a successful pilot project last year, the number of students placed in these stages increased from three to 10. This is due to the preparation of students in the classroom, building relationships with potential employers in the community, and students being motivated by the success of their peers.



Galileo student Julia Peces on her work stage at Super C with Department Manager Sylvain Simard. (Photo, Galileo Adult Centre)

Galileo's educators ease the transition to part-time work by simplifying job-training pathways. "Our students are learning the skills in our classrooms that are needed in the workforce. They are gaining a very practical, hands-on education which they are bringing to the real world," says Martina Schiavone, principal of Galileo.

Due to positive feedback from students and their employers, Galileo is expanding the program to include group stages of five to seven students.

### JFK Adult Education Centre shares International Tea Room, opens new SIS class

Every Thursday from 10:30 to 10:45 a.m., John F. Kennedy Adult Education Centre's (JFKAEC) SIS students offer a spot of tea and snacks to the JFKAEC community at their newly created International Tea Room. SIS students are gaining valuable experience in food preparation, including making the tea, taking orders, serving, and managing the cash.

Each month, the students choose a country to focus on, giving their guests the chance to sample new flavours and learn about different cultures and traditions of tea drinking around the world. The Tea Room is giving JFKAEC staff and students a chance to get to know the SIS



JFKAEC students enjoy their inaugural International Tea Room. (Photo, JFKAEC)

group. For example, BASIC English students come to the Tea Room during class time with their teacher for discussions, music and video demonstrations about the featured country. Kusmi Tea is a generous supporter of the program. If you're

### Wagar services academic and special needs students in a friendly, warm environment

Wagar Adult Education Centre in Côte Saint-Luc welcomes students to study English or French, special needs adults that follow the MELS SIS and SVIS programs, and houses C.A.R.E., a non-profit charitable organization that provides a recreational and educational day program for adults with physical disabilities.

Special needs students are recommended to the school from community partner organizations like the Miriam Home, CROM (West Montreal Readaptation Centre), CRDITED, The Center of Dreams & Hopes, and Benny Farm. Students range in age, from 21 and up.

Wagar is enhancing the lives of so many adults with special needs with stimulating and creative curriculum. Educator Heather Payne designs her class projects to fit with the abilities of her students. Together, they are creating artistic masterpieces that light up the hallways of the school. A dance teacher, Payne taps into her skills to bring music, dance, and poetry, to her classroom. Students also



Heather Payne teaches art and dance to special needs adult students at Wagar.

enjoy the Special Blend Café where they learn life skills like cooking. The SVIS program focuses on setting their students up for success by preparing them for the workforce, and engaging employers to provide work stages.

Principal Jacques Monfette sees students and staff interacting and enjoy learning from one another. "From time to time a special needs student will sit in on an English class," shares Monfette. "We see smiles on faces here."

in this Montreal neighborhood on a Thursday morning, why not stop by for a sip of tea?

Under the direction of teacher Louise Panet-Raymond and facilitator Milena Tognarini, the SIS students are also involved in various aspects of JFKAEC life, including recycling and cleaning. Of the many activities that the students experience, one of their favourites is a visit from a friendly St. John's Ambulance trained therapy dog. Five students are learning vocational skills in a modified SVIS Program.

#### New SIS class opens at JFKAEC

In February, JFKAEC opened up a second



JFKAEC SIS students enjoy a visit with their favourite St. John's Ambulance therapy dog. (Photo, Maya Volpato)

SIS class. This class has a focus on the arts, and is thriving under the direction of Linda Jewers and Irene Krawczuk, and volunteer Maya Volpato. "This class is a wonderful addition to our school community," shares Elizabeth Lagodich, principal of JFKAEC.

**Specialized adult education programs at the EMSB open doors for students**

## Galileo inaugurates Snack Shack

We all know how difficult it is for a student of any age to pay attention and learn on an empty stomach. Galileo Social Integration Students (SIS) are making sure that everyone is well fed with the inauguration of the Snack Shack.

This healthy snack program provides SIS students with practical experience working in a kitchen, and low cost (from one to two dollars per snack) healthy snacks to staff and all students.

SIS students shop, prepare, cook, serve and sell the food. This valuable culinary experience builds their confidence and can be transferred into the working world. "Every snack created by the students brings a sense of community, and

with every bite, you feel the love and feel at home at Galileo," says Schiavone.

Items on the menu include Jamaican patties, pizza, egg salad sandwiches, muffins, grilled cheese, and chocolates. Stop by for a healthy, affordable snack every day at 10:30 a.m.!

*Angela Spagnola, Benoît Duhême, Martina Schiavone, Giuseppe Romeo and Evelyn Alfonsi at the inauguration of the Snack Shack at Galileo.*



## Maxi & Cie gives back

Galileo has always been thankful for the constant support that Maxi & Cie has shown them by donating shopping gift cards to purchase food for their culinary program. On March 27, Maxi & Cie Director, Stephan Seguin and his team, spent the day at Galileo's Culinary Program, cooking a full meal with the SIS students. Seguin generously donated 15 gift cards for food purchases. Seguin has also welcomed SIS student, Tania, to hold a stage at Maxi.



*Stephan Seguin making homemade pasta dishes with Galileo SIS students. (Photo, Galileo Adult Centre)*

## EMSB and Giant Steps

The EMSB/Giant Steps Adult Program at the St. Laurent Adult Education Centre strives to inspire creativity and self-expression while encouraging the development of practical life skills. They emphasize the development of autonomy, employment readiness, social skills and functional academics.

The Adult Program has grown from a class of six, to 12 students in a larger classroom, with several work, building and art project stations on the go. Student in the program are assisted in identifying and developing their skills and interests, with the goal of finding interesting work/volunteer opportunities in the coming year. This year, students have benefitted from going on outings, with the intention of connecting to community resources and becoming more comfortable and autonomous in public spaces and on transit.

The educators continue to encourage the students to take charge of as many aspects of their lives at school as possible. The students are involved in both planning daily activities and reflecting on the quality of their experiences.



## Mental fitness tip #3: Self-acceptance

*By Despina Vassiliou, Ph. D. and Karla Dockery, Ph. D.*

Self-acceptance can be defined as a person's satisfaction with themselves (Shepard, 1979). There are three components to self-acceptance:

1. Being self-aware of strengths and weaknesses.
2. Having a realistic view of one's capabilities and talents.
3. Being satisfied with one's self in light of weakness, and past behaviours/choices.

Some tips on how to build self-acceptance in our children involves building other components of his or her self, such as:

1. Help them build a positive self-attitude:
  - a. Focus on what makes him or her UNIQUE. Those individual differences make us special.
  - b. Encourage the use of positive language in terms of how they see themselves.
2. Help them acknowledge and accept all aspects of themselves (their strengths as well as their challenges):
  - a. Have your child identify his or her strengths.
    - i. What are they best at?
    - ii. What do they love to do?
  - b. Help them identify what they need help in.
    - i. Brainstorm on how they can use some of their strengths to help with areas that are more challenging for them.
    - ii. Identify who they can turn to for help.
  - c. Help them set realistic goals of what they would like to accomplish. Having a goal in mind helps them focus on what they can do. They can then identify the steps they need to get there.
3. Concentrate on accomplishments and the progress made toward achieving the goal. The end result may not be as important as the learning that occurs through the journey to get to the goal. This learning process is critical to a person's development. For instance, if your child is struggling in a subject at school such as math, it is not the final mark that is important, but the fact that he or she put in the effort to learn and complete a test or assignment. Remember, we learn a great deal more with what we struggled to accomplish than what we can repeat easily.

By building these skills we are hoping that our children will develop a clear and strong identity. To understand who they are and accept who they are, with all of their strengths and challenges. As parents we cannot do this for our children, but we can lay the groundwork from which they can build and develop as they grow and mature. However, in most cases, we as parents have to be able to do this for ourselves. Modeling these elements can help children develop it for themselves as adults.

*Despina Vassiliou, Ph. D. and Karla Dockery, Ph. D. are EMSB school psychologists.*



# Government funding for REACH School going toward new gym

By Valentina Basilicata



Saint-Lambert Mayor Pierre Brodeur; Chairman of the Council of Commissioners of RSB Dan Lamoureux; Member for Laporte, Quebec Liberal Party and Chief Government Whip, Nicole Ménard; Principal Marie-Helen Goyetche, REACH, at a press conference January 29, 2018. (Photo, Riverside School Board)

REACH School of the Riverside School Board in Saint-Lambert, is the recent recipient of a \$2.5 million Quebec government investment, and is growing in more ways than one. With its student population nearly doubling from 50 to 89 in the last year, the funds will be used to build a gym at its new Queen Campus. There is currently no gym at either the Green or Queen site.

Marie-Helen Goyetche, REACH principal

since last autumn, says a proper gymnasium is long overdue. "They're special needs kids and they need their space to develop their gross motor [skills]. It will give them a place where they can socialize and play within safe parameters."

Goyetche, previously head of Crestview Elementary School in Laval for many years, understands the benefit of investing in special education. "We can't limit these kids. We can't underestimate these

kids. They have a lot to offer."

As for her staff of 60, she adds: "If you have the right facilities and the right environment, it's a lot more conducive to fun teaching."

The addition won't be ready until September 2019. For now, the school has converted a classroom into an exercise area, and students perform running activities in the hallway.

REACH is an English public school in Quebec that offers a specialized and individualized program for students aged four to 21 with significant developmental delays and intellectual challenges. It is part of the Riverside School Board.

In a January press release announcing the funding for the construction project, the school board emphasized the REACH administration and Riverside plan on "developing a new relationship with Saint-Lambert, one of collaboration and

support." This includes creating a "committee of elected officials, along with citizens, to review and make recommendations to how best proceed with this project . . . to move forward on this major project in a way that is beneficial to all."

Goyetche maintains the gym will not only benefit students. "It will allow us to have a space to gather the staff members of REACH, to have meetings and professional development and be able to open up for assemblies."

Her goal is to bring more English services to the South Shore. She has started by creating a parent support group called REACH C.A.R.E.S. and recently established the school as an off-site location for Gold Centre programs, like their 10-week ABA training session. "Hopefully, we'll be offering something from the Gold Centre on a regular basis," says Goyetche. She adds the city will have access to the gym as well. "It's not just for education."

Valentina Basilicata is a freelance journalist and communications specialist. She is also the proud mom of two boisterous, lovable boys. You can find out more about her work at [www.vbwriting.com](http://www.vbwriting.com)



## Book Review

By Wendy Singer

### E-book is a roadmap to life after diagnosis for families with a child with autism

*The Now-What Parents' Guide to Autism* by Joel Yanofsky (Today's Parent, \$7.99)

To mark World Autism Day 2018, *Today's Parent* launched the first e-book in a series of guides for Canadian parents whose kids have special needs: *The Now-What? Parents' Guide to Autism*, written by Joel Yanofsky.

Yanofsky's goal in writing this e-book was to be as straightforward and practical, and as easily accessible as possible. It is the first autism e-book for Canadian parents. The focus is on understanding autism and how to parent a child following their diagnosis. This e-book endeavors to equip parents with the information, resources and advice they need to do the best they can for their child, as well as their family.

"My hope is that parents reading this e-book will feel as if they're having a chat with well-informed, practical-minded, caring friends and sympathetic, down-to-earth experts," says Yanofsky, author of the prize-winning book *Bad Animals: A Father's Accidental Education in Autism*. "I hope parents think of what they find here as a kind of backup support group - one that won't sugar-coat the facts of life with ASD (autism spectrum disorder) but that also puts the emphasis on learning more about autism, in order to cope with it more effectively."

Montreal-based Yanofsky has no illusions about this e-book being definitive. "No

e-book or, for that matter, no book, series of books or library dedicated to autism ever could be," notes Yanofsky. "The same goes for the Internet. So much still remains unknown about ASD that the best someone like me, a parent and writer, can expect to do is encourage others to understand a little more every day and choose the strategies that are going to be most helpful to them as parents. My wish for this e-book is that it supports parents in that desire we all share to learn a little more and do a little better."

The e-book is available for download now on Kobo, Kindle and iBooks.



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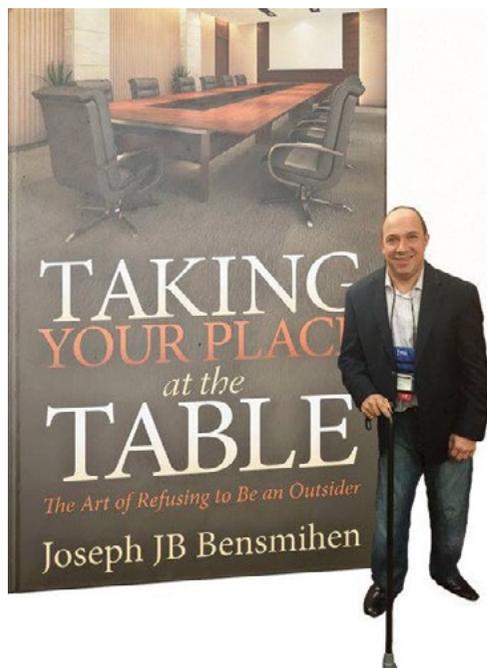
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## Refusing to be an outsider

By Randy Pinsky

More than merely espousing the merits of inclusive communities, Bensmihen has taken a much firmer approach, as evidenced by his recently released book, *Taking Your Place at the Table: Refusing to Be an Outsider*. He has a wealth of experience to draw from as a successful businessman and home health care executive, focusing on private services and caregiver rights.

In honour of Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month, Montreal's Adath Israel Synagogue invited Bensmihen to speak about his experiences. The crowd was captivated by the story of a frustrated little boy, indignant that a law could dictate where he could go to school. When he burst out, "Who made up that rule?" and was told "The Prime Minister," he insisted on speaking with him and convincing him otherwise.

Bensmihen credits much of his strong-willed nature and determination to right

injustices to his supportive family. Indeed, how many parents would listen to their son's demand to meet with the Prime Minister of Canada, and obligingly drive him to Ottawa?

Yet that's exactly what happened. Bensmihen recounted how he hobbled down the hall in Parliament, "looking for all the world like Forrest Gump." Somehow bypassing security, he found himself in the Prime Minister's office, where bewildered aids tried to explain that the Canadian leader was far too busy, to which he retorted, "Well, so am I."

The ruckus attracted the attention of P.E. Trudeau, who good-naturedly spent an hour speaking with the six-year old. This meeting left such an impression on the Prime Minister that it sparked five years of legal deliberations. At age 11, Bensmihen would become the first disabled Canadian student to be mainstreamed.

*Taking Your Place at the Table* was a way for Bensmihen to give tribute to his father, his hero and mentor who helped him believe he was unstoppable in spite of his disability. In fact, he revealed that as a child he was never really aware of his differences; "I thought every kid went home after school, had physio, beat up their sister, and then had supper."

He has firmly embodied this belief through giving over 600 inspirational speeches in a variety of venues, and walking the 2016 Miami Marathon- with two canes.

Bensmihen's commitment as an outspoken advocate for change is critical for those unable to request it themselves. Whether as a regular speaker at Friendship Circle chapters, or advocating for mainstreaming people with disabilities, he emphasizes the value that all can contribute if included at the table.

It took the indignation of a six-year old, chafing at the glaring injustice of being discriminated against because of his disability, to challenge the system and provoke a change that adults could not. ✨



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WEEKNIGHTS 5 & 6



# Friends for LIFE

By Cindy Andersen

Six years ago, I became the teacher for the LIFE Program (Learning Independence through Functional Education), a program of the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) for students aged 18 to 21 with special needs. My colleague, Special Education Technician Catherine Burrell (The Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2017)

A lot has changed since then. We are now under the Horizon High School umbrella, we've had several students complete the LIFE program, and most importantly, we have been welcomed into the Lindsay Place High School community, thanks to one teacher's commitment to inclusion - Physical Education Teacher, Jim Hiotis and the support of the LPHS administration under David Estok.



LPHS students Tyler and Sam, teacher Jim Hiotis, LIFE students Josh and Alex, working together in Mr. Hiotis' wood room at LPHS.

Our class is situated near the lower gym and unless you're a Phys Ed teacher, you're probably not going to run into us very often. Jim began to stop in from time to time to say hello. He had an immediate connection with our students and after discovering that a couple of our guys love bas-

ketball, he began inviting us down for open gym and various Phys Ed classes which he modified for each of our students' individual needs.

Thus began an "unofficial" peer mentor-

ing program between LIFE and LPHS. Our biggest project was creating the medals for the LBPSB Annual Family Fun Run. Jim, with the help of LPHS retiree, Raf Dager, cut more than 300 medals from wood and taught our LIFE students how to sand and drill holes. Our students were excited to work in the wood class side by side with them. LIFE students benefited from the interactions with their peers, learning social and behavioural skills, while their peers increased their ability to appreciate and accept individual differences and diversity, with respect for all people. We witnessed friendships forming.

Jim expressed to us how significant this peer mentoring experience has been for his students, saying that for some of these students this may be the only opportunity they will have to work with students with special needs. His hope is that these experiences will encourage some of his students to investigate a future career in the area of special needs, something they may have never considered before.

Our "unofficial" peer mentoring program continues, with several projects planned for the future.

Cindy Andersen is a teacher with the LIFE Program at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

## Introducing our new logo



With the guidance of our esteemed volunteer Fay Schipper, and the creative talent of our designer Nur Erdem, we have updated our logo to better represent inclusive communities.

We hope you find it more representative of who we are and the work that we do. We love hearing your story ideas and suggestions.

Contact us at [info@inspirationsnews.com](mailto:info@inspirationsnews.com) or 514-483-7200 #7244.

## Buddy Benches made by L.I.N.K.S. entrepreneurs

By Julie Chou-Lachapelle

Buddy Benches have become a popular tool in many North American schoolyards to combat loneliness and foster kindness among students. Many children struggle with making friends; shyness, self-confidence, social and communication skill levels are just some barriers that prevent students from seeking companionship.

The idea behind the Buddy Bench is simple but effective. When a student feels lonely or has no one to play with during recess, he or she can sit on the bench.

Other students recognize this student in need of company and can offer their friendship.

Special Education Teacher Anthony Fowler of L.I.N.K.S. High School (EMSB) for students with special needs, is teaching his entrepreneurship class to build Buddy Benches from scratch. Students learn how to read plans, measure, cut, sand, drill and paint. Exterior glue, screws and paint are used so the benches can withstand harsh winter conditions. The end result is a 100 percent handcrafted,



Entrepreneurship students at L.I.N.K.S. High School build Buddy Benches from scratch. (Photo, Ali Awada)

beautiful, sturdy product that the students are extremely proud of making. While Mr. Fowler has been making benches in his class for two years, this is the first year that they are being marketed as Buddy Benches.

One of these benches has already made its way to an elementary school of a former student in Mr. Fowler's class. Hopefully, L.I.N.K.S. Buddy Benches will be spotted in many more schoolyards throughout the city.

If you are interested in purchasing a Buddy Bench (\$85) or donating wood or other materials, contact Mr. Fowler at [AFowler@EMSB.qc.ca](mailto:AFowler@EMSB.qc.ca) or (514) 723-2845.

## Digital social stories for students with ASD

By Tania Piperni, M.Ed

For years, Parkdale Elementary School in St Laurent, of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), has been addressing the needs of many students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) within their multiple self-contained classes, alongside their mainstream classrooms. Now the school has embarked on a Professional Development and Innovation Grant (from LEARN) project creating digital social stories for their students with ASD to learn a variety of social skills.

These stories are based on the theory behind *Social Stories™* as created by Carol Gray, a tool that schools often implement for students with autism.

The project was initially developed by Marylène Perron, principal of Parkdale, in the Fall of 2017, and Maureen Bar-

on, Information and Communications Technology education consultant in the Educational and Technology Services Department at the EMSB. Teachers at Parkdale worked with Mitchell Berljawsky, a Masters of Educational Technology intern from Concordia University, to start a virtual library of social stories. The stories contain helpful strategies for students to use when frustrated by a variety of school-based events. For example, remaining calm on the school bus, behaving appropriately at recess, and asking for help. Through animated visual graphics, a specific situation is broken down.



Teachers Shelley Sokoloff, Janna Maggio and Nancy Zafiris assist in starting a virtual library at Parkdale Elementary School.

Situations where frustrations can occur are explained and appropriate responses to deal with the difficult emotions are offered.

Berljawsky created these particular stories to be culturally diverse in order to accurately reflect the population at Parkdale. He began this project in the

classrooms throughout the school day. Alongside this, he discussed his data with the classroom teachers, to get a sense of which topics were more pertinent to address. The special education teachers involved included Shelley Sokoloff, Janna Maggio and Nancy Zafiris. They have already begun using the stories within their classrooms. The older students regularly read and listen to the stories attentively, while the younger students have had the stories read to them. In May, parents of these students will be introduced to the digital stories and trained on how to access and use them at an evening session at Parkdale. Technology teacher Kristen Keyes will be onsite to train parents on how to access the stories on their electronic devices.

At a time when parents may be looking for more resources to help their children deal with ASD, the EMSB has created this databank of social stories that are freely available through the Parkdale School website [www.emsb.qc.ca/parkdale](http://www.emsb.qc.ca/parkdale).

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

## Blue Light offers adults with special needs a day-program in Kirkland

By Cindy Davis

Rino Varrichio has been operating a group home for individuals with special needs in Kirkland for 15 years. He has seen many of his residents grow from children to adults and noted that after the school-aged years, many of these individuals have nowhere to go during the day.

He was already deeply entrenched in the special needs community when his own son, who's now nine, was diagnosed with autism. Varrichio really wanted to ensure that his son, along with other children with special needs, would have stimulating, productive and educational lives after they turn 21. Together with Sayees Yogendran, a caregiver in Varrichio's home, he opened Blue Light Adult Program this past September.

"This program was created for the people on the 'waiting list'. A lot of parents have no options, so we're giving them options," says Varrichio.

Blue Light is a program for adults with intellectual disabilities or autism designed to help them acquire skills to integrate and participate in society to their fullest potential, in a fun and stimulating way. Located in a rented space at Excellent Ice in Kirkland, the program offers educational and recreational programming in the morning, and outings after lunch. The group can be found at the local library, swimming, bowling, at the gym, or participating in their specialized yoga program. Blue Light also runs a recycling program, where the group collects bottles and cans from local restaurants and



Blue Light Adult Program member learns how to prepare a tasty treat. (Photo, Blue Light Program)

uses the money earned to purchase ingredients for special meals that they cook themselves. "The main focus is to keep them focused and active during the day. Instead of staying home, they come and learn life skills," says Yogendran.

Varrichio and Yogendran hope to create two groups next year; a high functioning group which will have a ratio of five members to one staff, and a lower func-

tioning group with a three to one ratio. As they grow, they say, they will move to a larger West Island location. There are also plans to open a second location to serve the populations in the east end of Montreal and Laval.

Blue Light Program offers a sports summer camp for children and adults with intellectual disabilities or autism. Run by Yogendran, who has many years of experience as a summer camp leader, the program is designed to provide stimulation, development and social integration in a safe environment.

Weekend respite care is also offered to primary caregivers. "Our motto is that we're trying to make a difference," says Varrichio. "We're trying to bring (individuals with special needs) into society, to have activities and to enjoy their lives."

For information or to donate, visit [www.bluelightprogram.com](http://www.bluelightprogram.com) or call (514) 581-7641.



## “Transition Planning: When and How” discussed at seminar at the EMSB

By Cindy Davis

Inspirations teamed up with Make It Matter to present a seminar on the topic of “Transition Planning: When and How”, at the English Montreal School Board (EMSB). The purpose was to inform parents, caregivers and professionals about their children’s transition process from school to adult life. Speakers included Jennifer Grier, social worker in Specialized Schools at the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre, and Pina Evangelista, TÉVA (Transition École Vie Active) consultant for the EMSB, who explained about the services of a social worker, and how to prepare for the

transition out of school at the age of 21 and into the community. Julie René de Cotret, assistant director of Student Services at the EMSB, shared her experience as a parent of a son with special needs. Suzanne Cloutier, associate director of Rehabilitation at CIUSSS West-Central Montreal addressed housing opportunities for people with autism, intellectual and physical disabilities, touching on options like private homes, and the option of converting one’s own home to house other individuals with disabilities. Joanne Charron, parent commissioner, Advisory Committee for Special Education Ser-

vices at the EMSB, spoke about her experience benefitting from all three of our speakers’ services. Helene Donath and Harriet Sugar Miller, parents and founders of Club ALink, informed on their mission to create an inclusive community and to build housing for their children.

The event provided parents with crucial information, gave key players in the community the opportunity to network with parents and hear the challenges that they face, and connected community organizations and



Julie René de Cotret, Lew Lewis, director, Student Services, EMSB, and Pina Evangelista at the Transitioning seminar at the EMSB.

sparked ideas for action moving forward. Read more on our blog at <http://inspirationsnewsmtl.blogspot.ca>.



## Seizing great opportunities takes the courage to believe in yourself

By Jay Jones-Doyle

At various points in our lives we are presented with opportunities that we want to pursue but are afraid to. For certain people, the mental list of why they “cannot/should not” can populate very quickly, almost as a knee-jerk reaction. Others are able to silence the daunting voice in their head and concentrate on taking the necessary steps to achieve the goal in front of them – but this is easier said than done.

Everyone, at different times, believes in themselves to different degrees. This is normal, as 100 percent confidence all the time is not healthy; we need to be vulnerable as it helps us grow. This growth comes when we carry on in the face of self-doubt or fear. When faced with challenges, I drew strength from sayings that I gathered, particularly in my teens and early adult years, which acted as immutable truths that forced my actions forward. Here are a smattering of my favourites, and why they are so impactful on me.

1. *He who says he can’t and he who says he can are both usually right.*

This reinforced my notion of self-determination as the main driver of success. If you chose to decide, before even trying, that you will not succeed, then you become your own worst enemy.

2. *Feel the fear and do it anyways.*

This made me realize that feeling fear and apprehension is not something to be ashamed of, but rather a natural and required step in growing as an individual. Putting yourself in unfamiliar or stressful situations is frightening – but feeling fear should not prevent you from taking action. When you own the fear, it loses all power over you.

3. *If you choose not to engage with someone for fear of being judged (negatively) are you not judging that person?*

This was a game-changer for me. I have a stutter, so naturally the prospect of going up to strangers and talking to them for the first time was terrifying. In the process of unpacking that terror, I began to understand what I was really worried about. I then realized that by not engaging I was being the person that I was afraid they might be, and I was preventing both parties from potentially sharing a valuable interaction. From that day on I couldn’t justify not approaching another person!

These sayings are just a few that have helped me to stand tall and trundle forward towards my future. Find your own strengths, and don’t hesitate to share them. Believe in yourself, be kind to others, express yourself intelligently, say yes at least three times as often as you say no, and good things will happen.

Jay Jones-Doyle is the co-founder and president of Legal Lighthouse Inc., the president of Confidence Driven Coach-



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ing, the CFO of the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, and worked at the UN’s Business and Biodiversity program. He holds two advanced degrees, is a motivational speaker, has cerebral palsy, and is the proud father of a 13-year old son.



## Montreal Special Needs Foundation here to help families

By Randy Pinsky



The Monkland Community Centre and MSNF hold a basketball fundraiser. (Photo, MSNF)

When Maddie Pettigrosso's daughter was one year old, she sensed that something was off. Her once bright and alert baby girl was experiencing seizures and regressing rapidly. Pettigrosso's motherly intuition would be confirmed as Victoria was diagnosed with severe global developmental delay, unlikely to ever walk or talk.

Much to Pettigrosso's dismay, doctors were matter-of-fact and unsympathetic, resources were scarce, and she realized

this was going to be a lonely and daunting battle.

After endless appointments and expensive therapies, Victoria is now an active, verbal, and mobile young adult.

Pettigrosso has not forgotten this harrowing experience, and vowed that she would do everything she could so that no other parent would ever be caught in such a maze, struggling to figure things out on their own. Determined to help,

she grouped together like-minded individuals and began a foundation where families could find support, solace, and direction. From kitchen table talks, the Montreal Special Needs Foundation (MSNF) was born. Pettigrosso is a crusader, financial advisor, and confidant for dozens of families. All actions are guided by the cornerstones of compassion, knowledge, and respect.

MSNF's focus is on enhancing quality of life through early intervention. Linking together various therapies, it provides guidance on grants, tax exemptions, and benefits such as respite care. With easy-to-follow checklists, action is centralized as the options have already been sifted through. It is guided by the belief that every child with special needs deserves therapy regardless of their financial situation. The site even details a breakdown of prices and wait times to give an idea of the challenging reality faced by many.

The Foundation coordinates community fundraisers to make therapies a realistic prospect for those unable to afford them. Last year, MSNF's efforts were recognized by the UPS Award for Community Work (\$5,000). These funds will help those

who contend with endless waiting lists, or opt for private care.

Recently, MSNF partnered with the Monkland Community Center (MCC) to host a basketball fundraiser. The MCC was an ideal partner, having collaborated on numerous fundraisers for organizations such as Make a Wish Foundation, Chez Doris, and Head and Hands.

Head Coach Larry Williams is the driving force behind the social action efforts, acting as much as a mentor as a basketball coach. "We believe everyone is equal" he noted, adding that while adults notice differences, children just see potential playmates.

When Pettigrosso started her journey with her daughter, she was not satisfied with the care she received and promised that, one day, she would have a center of her own. "I will roll out the red carpet for these parents", she said fiercely. "No one else will go through what I did if I can help it."

For information, visit <https://www.msnf.ca>



## Two brothers share one goal: Take stigma out of autism

By Valentina Basilicata

Montreal brothers Jack, 14, and Quinn, 11, are excited to serve as local and national co-ambassadors for the Autism Speaks Canada Walk held in eight cities across the country. The Montreal walk will take place on Sunday, May 27.

"Being national ambassadors for this cause means a lot to us," explains Jack. "We represent the millions of children and adults who struggle with autism every day."

Jack, with Quinn by his side, has spent the last few months promoting the event and raising awareness for the cause.

"If you know somebody who struggles with autism, come out and walk for them. Show them . . . you will do anything to

make sure that they are the best they can be. That is what I do for my brother . . . because I love my brother."

Proud mom Donna Greenspon explains Jack and Quinn are on different ends of the spectrum; both were diagnosed before the age of three. Jack is determined, eloquent and an honour student in Grade 8. Quinn, who attends Summit School, is shy and less verbal but has a great sense of humour, according to mom.

Donna will be walking as team captain with her "JQ Crew" at the McGill University - Tomlinson Fieldhouse location where over 1,000 other Montreal walkers will join her. Autism Speaks Canada projects the signature event will raise \$903,800 nationally and \$95,000 in Montreal this year.

Brothers Jack and Quinn are co-ambassadors for this year's Autism Speaks Canada Walk. (Photo, John Oliveri Photography)



"We've been part of the walks every single year since the inaugural walk in Montreal, except last year," notes Donna. "Before that we had been involved in trying to bring the walk to Montreal."

After receiving years of support from family, friends, teachers and a long list of therapists, Donna knows all too well that it takes a village to raise a child. She sees this event as an opportunity to give back to the community that was there for her and her family.

"We benefitted directly from Autism Speaks," she says. "We benefitted from everyone who came before us - all the research, all the advocacy. We want to pay it forward."

For Jack, it's about changing people's perspective. "Many kids use the expression 'this is so autistic' to signify something stupid. We want that expression to

signify something positive. We want to show that just because you have autism, doesn't mean you are less of a person. We have autism and are proud of who we are."

Team Inspirations EMSB will be walking to raise awareness and funds for autism at the Autism Speaks Canada - Montreal walk on Sunday, May 27. We invite you to join our team! For information, contact Alana Goodings at [agoodings@emsb.qc.ca](mailto:agoodings@emsb.qc.ca). To join the team or make a donation, visit [ASCwalk.ca](http://ASCwalk.ca) and search for Team Inspirations EMSB. —\*—



# Sports

With Sports Editor *Daniel Smajovits*

## AQVA puts wind in the sails of individuals with mobility impairments

By *Valentina Basilicata*

For people with reduced mobility, the non-profit Association québécoise de voile adaptée (AQVA) isn't just about sailing – it's about freedom. Since 1996, hundreds of experienced and novice sailors as young as the age of 10 have been leaving their wheelchairs on the dock at the Pointe Claire Yacht Club and Sherbrooke's Club Nautique du Petit Lac Magog to independently steer an adapted boat with a certified instructor.

"Other than boccia, I think that sailing is the only sport people with a high level of disability can do. In some cases, it's



An AQVA instructor and member sail away on a Martin 16. (Photo, AQVA)

a totally new experience for people. [It gives] many of them a sense of self-esteem because they've learned a new skill," explains Paula Stone, sailing programs director for AQVA. A former occupational therapist, Stone has been volunteering with the organization for over 20 years. She owns the Quebec company, KAPE Boatworks, which manufactures the adapted Martin 16 sailboats.

Angela Leduc, 30, uses a wheelchair be-

cause of her right-sided hemiparesis but has been sailing without it thanks to the AQVA for nine years and loves it. Her mother, Betty Aikens, wasn't crazy about the idea at first. She was concerned for Leduc's safety but was quickly reassured once she met the qualified instructors and became familiar with the adapted boats. Aikens recalls her daughter's first sailing session: "Angela went out and I just watched her sail away. When she came back, she had the biggest smile on her face."

Measuring 16 feet, each sailboat has room for two: the sailor and the instructor. The boat cannot tip over, is unsinkable, and the sailor doesn't have to move once aboard. The steering controls and ropes for the sails are directly in front of the person.

"If the person doesn't have enough strength to handle the steering and the ropes, then we can put in a motorized system so they can sail the boat with a

joystick – just like on a power wheelchair. If someone is even too weak to do that, then they can control the boat with two straws using a sip and puff system," clarifies Stone. Additional seating can also be added to provide extra head or trunk support.

An AQVA membership costs \$15. Each summer, members can reserve two sailing sessions per week at a cost of \$15 per session (free for children) up to two weeks in advance. Sessions last about an hour and a half. Groups are also welcome.

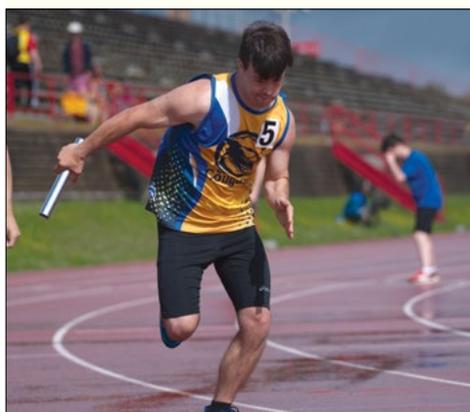
"In June it's often school groups. Otherwise it's places like the Action Centre, it could be an MS support group . . . or the ALS society of Quebec," says Stone.

Individuals or groups, young or old, expert or beginner – every sailor returns smiling after time spent on the water with the wind in their hair, temporarily free from the constraints of their bodies.

For information, visit <https://aqvaqc.com>

## Olympiques spéciaux Québec : L'inclusion sociale par le sport

Par *Daniel Granger*



Maxime Clavette du club d'athlétisme les Cougars de la Rive-Sud, en action sur la piste du PEPS de l'Université Laval lors des Jeux d'été OSQ 2017 à Québec, le 2 juillet 2017.

(Photo, Olympiques spéciaux Québec)

### Des partenaires qui réchauffent le cœur

Le 17 février dernier, 36 équipes de femmes et d'hommes de tous les âges ont sauté dans l'eau glacée du fleuve Saint-

Laurent pour les athlètes d'Olympiques spéciaux Québec (OSQ). Policiers et policières, politiciens, gens d'affaires et athlètes OSQ étaient tous regroupés pour relever le Défi de l'Ours polaire, sautant costumés sous les applaudissements de centaines de partisans emmitoufflés dans leurs manteaux d'hiver. Ce défi est un bel exemple des actions organisées par les policiers et policières de tous les services de police du Québec, regroupés sous la Course au flambeau des agents de la paix.

### Le circuit de l'inclusion sociale

Depuis plus de 35 ans, OSQ permet à des milliers de personnes vivant avec une déficience intellectuelle de faire partie d'un réseau organisé d'entraînements et de compétitions sportives.

Pour les plus de 7200 athlètes du mouvement, Olympiques spéciaux Québec c'est beaucoup plus que du sport : c'est l'occasion de développer leurs habiletés

motrices et sociales, ainsi que leur motivation, leur persévérance et leur volonté de se dépasser.

Les athlètes peuvent choisir de pratiquer un ou plusieurs sports, parmi les 10 sports d'été et 7 sports d'hiver offerts. Grâce au dévouement de nombreux bénévoles, nos sections locales de la grande région métropolitaine de Montréal comptent plus de 1500 athlètes inscrits en sports organisés et plus de 2000 élèves qui participent au programme scolaire.

Chaque année, nous organisons plus de 50 compétitions incluant un championnat provincial dans chacun des sports. Nous présentons des Jeux d'été et d'hiver en alternance tous les deux ans, dans différentes villes du Québec. Ces Jeux sont de grands rendez-vous sportifs et de belles manifestations en faveur de l'inclusion sociale. Les athlètes offrent leurs meilleures performances dans un esprit sportif, échantent avec leurs amis des

autres régions et participent à des activités sociales.

La présentation des cliniques Athlètes en santé, lors des Jeux d'été et d'hiver, permet aux athlètes d'être sensibilisés aux saines habitudes de vie et de rencontrer des professionnels de la santé qui les examinent, les conseillent, et les dirigent vers les ressources adéquates. Depuis 2017, des cliniques communautaires pour les élèves du programme scolaire sont organisées, avec la collaboration de plusieurs universités, et permettent aux étudiants de se familiariser avec les besoins de ces jeunes différents. Olympiques spéciaux Québec est une organisation ouverte et accessible qui développe l'inclusion sociale par le sport.

Pour plus de renseignements, visitez Facebook @olympiquesspeciauxquebec ou [www.olympiquesspeciauxquebec.ca](http://www.olympiquesspeciauxquebec.ca)

Bénévole depuis de nombreuses années, Daniel Granger est le président d'Olympiques spéciaux Québec.



## Sports



### Record setting Paralympic Games for Team Canada

With a record 28 medals at the 2018 PyeongChang Winter Paralympic Games, Team Canada recaptured its place as a winter sports powerhouse.

Overall, 49 nations and over 500 athletes, including 55 Canadians, participated in PyeongChang, making it the largest Games to date.

Leading the charge for Team Canada was Mark Arendz, who set a Canadian record by capturing six medals across two Para nordic events: biathlon and cross country skiing. With one gold, two silver, and three bronze medals, the Hartsville, Prince Edward Island native was also named Canada's flag bearer for the closing ceremonies following his unprecedented performance.

While Arendz led the way in 2018, perhaps Canada's best known Paralympic athlete of all time, Brian McKeever, cemented his position in athletic lore by earning three more medals in PyeongChang, making him the most decorated Canadian athlete of all time. McKeever, also a Para nordic skier, first competed at the 2002 Paralympic Games and has earned 17 medals, 13 of which are gold.

If McKeever represents the current generation of Canadian Paralympians, 18-year-old Mollie Jepsen will lead the charge for the next generation of athletes, as she burst onto the world stage with four Para alpine skiing medals. Not to be outdone, 17-year-old teammate Natalie Wilkie was Canada's youngest athlete and earned the trio: gold, silver and bronze in cross-country skiing.

On the team front, the Para ice hockey men bested their able-bodied counterparts, bringing home a silver medal after losing in overtime to the United States. Canada also earned a bronze medal in wheelchair curling, giving 58-year-old

Jamie Anseeuw the title as Canada's oldest medalist.

The Paralympic Games continue to make inroads in the world of sports, shining a light on disabled athletes. Recently, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and the International Paralympic Committee (IPC) agreed to extend their partnership until 2032, ensuring that any Olympic host city must also welcome the Paralympic Games. Furthermore, the IPC will receive funding from its counterpart and also benefit from its brand and marketing opportunities.

The world now turns to Tokyo, Japan, for the 16th Summer Paralympic Games, scheduled for August 2020. More than 150 countries and 4,000 athletes will compete in 22 sports and Canada will look to top its 2016 haul of 29 medals as they take to the world stage in the Land of the Rising Sun.



Mark Arendz collects his gold medal in the men's biathlon 15km standing during the medal ceremony at the PyeongChang Olympic Plaza during the 2018 Winter Paralympic Games in Pyeongchang, Korea. (Photo, Dave Holland/Canadian Paralympic Committee)



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### Lucky Habs fan wins a game!

Courtesy of La Capitale, the English Montreal School Board and *Inspirations*, two lucky Montrealers recently won a chance to see the Montreal Canadiens take on the Ottawa Senators in a rare matinee game at the Bell Centre.

With over 1,000 entries, Maria Troli was chosen, allowing her son Nicholas to attend the game with his father. For Nicholas, who has autism, this gift was truly special. "When I told Nicholas that we had won the tickets, he was super excited and amazed," said Troli. "We wanted tickets to this game, but we were unable to get them."

Due to Nicholas' autism, evening activities often pose a problem for him, so the afternoon game was the perfect opportunity to allow him to see his favourite team in person. "Nicholas is a huge Habs fan and never misses a game," added Troli. "His favourite player is still P.K. Subban, but a close second is Carey Price."

While Nicholas enjoyed the game in the stands, it was even more special for his father, who is battling cancer. "On behalf of our family, thank you again for this amazing gift, Nicholas had an amazing time!"



Nicholas enjoys a Habs game with his father.



## TAMPA BAY

# Adapted Travel

By Mike Cohen

**BEAUTIFUL TAMPA BAY:** Last year my family and I spent our winter vacation in St. Petersburg, Florida. However, when it came to shopping and dining, we found ourselves commuting to Tampa on a fairly regular basis. We liked what we saw and were sure to make it our base this time around.

The hip, urban heart of Florida's Gulf coast beats in Tampa Bay ([www.visit-tampabay.com](http://www.visit-tampabay.com)). Here cultural gems mingle with authentic history to create an atmosphere that inspires awe and adventure. Whether your quest is for art spanning antiquity to the modern era, sensational live entertainment or other untold delights, imaginative and inspiring thrills await around every corner.

**WHERE TO STAY:** It was very nice to stay in the downtown area and the gorgeous Tampa Marriott Waterside Hotel & Marina ([www.tampamarriottwaterside.com](http://www.tampamarriottwaterside.com)), only eight minutes from the airport. Offering spectacular views, stellar service and a high-quality experience all around, this upscale hotel is particularly well-situated for guest convention-goers or if you want to an NHL game with the host Lightning across the street at the Amalie Arena. And as I found out, it is a pretty good choice for a family vacation as well, with its central location, superb facilities and top-notch customer service.

This striking, 27-storey high-end property has more than 700 non-smoking rooms and suites that feature private balconies overlooking Harbour Island, downtown and the hotel's 32-slip marina. All rooms include high-end signature bedding, flat-screen TVs that can connect with laptops and large, luxe bathrooms with the softest, fluffiest white towels and sleek granite countertops.

High-speed in-room internet is available for a daily service fee, and it is free in public spaces. General amenities include a palm-studded pool and groovy hot tub and a full-service spa/gym on the third floor, a business center and

multiple newly renovated options for wining/dining that include white tablecloth fancy, sports bar casual, poolside grill and a lobby-side Starbucks cafe. There's both valet and self-parking, each for a daily rate. At night you can enjoy live music, adding to a very uplifting atmosphere.

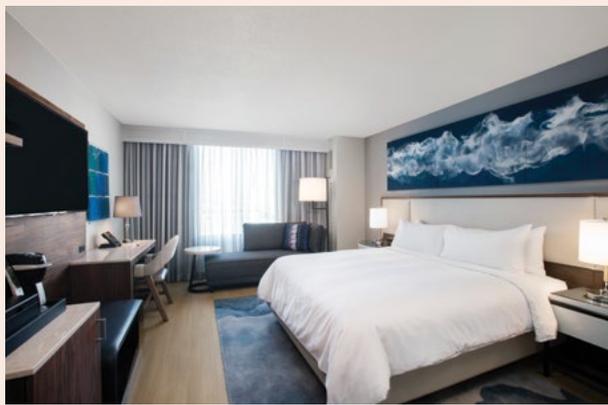
Following \$2.5 million in improvements in 2013, the hotel is currently in the midst of a \$40 million upgrade. Every single room has received a makeover, as will the lobby. The check-in desk will move to a pod format and a full service Starbucks is in the works, along with an expanded outdoor patio, an outdoor beer garden and an extremely popular Topgolf simulator, using real golf balls.

My family really fell in love with the pool setting. For starters this is a good sized pool with plenty of seating options. Besides standard lounge chairs, there are many chairs and couches with soft and ultra-comfort cushion covers and standalone large cushioned lounge chairs located next to gigantic umbrellas which will shield you from the sun. You can order drinks and food from the bar.

We stayed in one of the magnificently newly renovated luxury suites on the 22nd floor. I must say that when the bellman opened the door we were left speechless by the space and beauty of what would be our home for five nights.

While we did take advantage of the 24 hour room service, one night we chose to stay at the hotel and have dinner at the Waterside Grill. Let me strongly recommend this as a dining choice whether you are staying at the hotel or not. The restaurant offers a relaxed atmosphere and delicious American cuisine. You can feast on fresh seafood, prime steaks, expertly crafted cocktails and decadent desserts. They are open for breakfast, lunch and dinner and you can dine inside or on the terrace facing the Tampa waterfront. This was a meal that indeed

exceeded our expectations. You can read the menus on the hotel website or call 813-221-4900 for reservations.



*A renovated room at the Marriott Waterside.*

The hotel is ADA compliant. Following the latest renovations, 23 rooms are listed as ADA and hearing impaired. There is also an entire floor devoted to health and wellness, featuring aromatherapy, circadian mood lighting, a dawn simulator, an energizing light, a stay well mattress, a vitamin c shower infuser and nutritious menu options. The hotel has an accessible front entrance, six elevators and ramps leading to the Riverwalk.

**CITY PASS:** Like other cities when you want to play a bit of tourist, get the CityPass (<https://www.citypass.com/tampa#6QcVgMcR8yS4QVcg.99>). It is only \$143.29 for adults and \$129.77 for children. This includes admission to Busch Gardens, The Florida Aquarium, the Lowry Park Zoo, the Clearwater Marina Aquarium and either the Museum



*The Florida Aquarium.*

of Science & Industry (MOSI) or the Chi-huly Collection.

Busch Gardens Tampa Bay ([www.buschgardentampa.com](http://www.buschgardentampa.com)) is the ultimate family adventure, offering 300 acres of fascinating attractions based on exotic explorations around the world. A unique blend of thrilling rides, one of the country's premier zoos with more than 12,000 animals, live shows, restaurants, shops and games, this spot provides unrivaled excitement for guests of every age.

Guest Relations is situated inside the park entrance at Adventure Outpost, on the left hand side as you enter the park. Guests with disabilities are welcome to stop by for any assistance they require. Parking for guests with disabilities is available in Lot A near the main entrance on a first-come, first-served basis for guests with a legal parking permit. This parking area is designated by blue-striped parking lanes. All spaces are van-accessible. Vehicles parked in disabled parking without a permit are subject to applicable laws. Wheelchairs and Electric Convenience Vehicles (ECV's) may be rented at Stroller Rental near the front gate of the park in Morocco. Wheelchairs and ECV's are available for a nominal fee on a "first-come, first served" basis to guests with disabilities. Guests may also use their own wheelchairs or single passenger ECV's. Guests using wheelchairs may join any admissions line to enter the park. The use of Segways is not permitted.

Located right across the street from Busch Gardens is Adventure Island's ([www.Adventureisland.com](http://www.Adventureisland.com)) 30 acres of water-drenched fun in the sun. It features the ultimate combination of high-speed thrills and tropical, tranquil surroundings for guests of all ages. You can access their full accessibility guide on their website.

The Florida Aquarium ([www.flaquarium.org](http://www.flaquarium.org)) is one of the top of its kind in the country, with over 20,000 sea creatures! The main entrance is accessible by wheelchair. The Aquarium is fully

## Adapted Travel TAMPA BAY

accessible to the disabled and a limited number of wheelchairs are available for rent on a first-come, first-serve basis with appropriate identification. Handicapped parking is available on a first-come, first-serve basis in the lot located north of the Aquarium on the east side of Channelside Drive.

At Tampa's Lowry Park Zoo ([www.lowryzoo.org](http://www.lowryzoo.org)) you can see more than 1,200 animals, including manatees, koalas, elephants, tigers, penguins, giraffes, orangutans and much more. The Zoo's Visitor Service staff is pleased to assist guests requiring special assistance to ensure an enjoyable experience. Just contact a supervisor in advance of your visit by email or at (813) 935-8552 ext. 0 to learn more about access, rentals, autism, service animals and sign language.

Tampa's Museum of Science & Industry, better known as MOSI ([www.mosi.org](http://www.mosi.org)), is a scientific playground with more than 450 hands-on activities in the largest science center in the southeastern United States. MOSI is wheelchair accessible. Automatic doors are located at the main entrance from the MOSI Entry Plaza and parking lot. Handicapped parking spaces are available near the entrance to MOSI. The property surrounding the museum is paved. Wheelchairs are available at no additional cost on a first-come, first-served basis at the MOSI Ticket Office. Guests must leave a driver's license or credit card at the ticket office until the wheelchair is returned.

**FOX RENT A CAR:** For the best rates go with Fox Rent a Car ([www.foxrentacar.com](http://www.foxrentacar.com)). The company just recently moved into the new rental facility at the airport in Tampa. We drove away with a brand new Chrysler 300. At Fox you'll find economy cars, family-size cars, SUVs, mini-vans and luxury or sport vehicles available for your discount rental. The Tampa operation is managed by Edgar Hernandez, who has been with Fox since the company first arrived in Florida six years ago. In addition to Tampa, their Sunshine State locations include Orlando, Fort Myers, Miami and Fort Lauderdale. The Tampa location is open 24 hours a day. For more information call (800) 225-4369 Ext. 1 or (310) 641-3838 Ext. 1 for customer

service call toll free (800) 225-4369 Ext. 9 Fox does assist with reserving vehicles with hand controls. Fox cannot provide hand controls on every make or model of vehicle, and cannot confirm a reservation for a particular make or model of vehicle on any rental. Please call (800) 225-4369 at least 72 hours in advance to make your reservation. For assistance with a wheelchair-accessible shuttle, you can call (929)-346-0099.



*The beautiful Andalusia dining room at the Columbia.*

### DINING OUT

#### THE COLUMBIA RESTAURANT:

When in Tampa, you must experience Florida's oldest restaurant and in fact the largest Spanish dining establishment in the world. The Columbia Restaurant ([www.columbiarestaurant.com](http://www.columbiarestaurant.com)) was founded in 1905 by Cuban immigrant Casimiro Hernandez Sr. It began in Tampa's Ybor City, (pronounced EE-bore) as a small 60-seat corner cafe known for its Cuban coffee and authentic Cuban sandwiches, frequented by the local cigar workers.

The original Ybor City location is nothing short of magnificent. Additional Columbia locations include St. Armands Circle in Sarasota, the Historic District in St. Augustine, Sand Key on Clearwater Beach, Central Florida's town of Celebration, Columbia Café on the Riverwalk in Tampa and Columbia Restaurant Café at Tampa International Airport. All Columbia locations are owned and operated by fourth and fifth generation members of the founding family except for the airport, which is operated in partnership with HMSHost.

Some of the menu favorites include Columbia's Original "1905" Salad,® Spanish Bean Soup, The Original Cuban Sandwich, a variety of Tapas, Paella, Red

Snapper "Alicante," Pompano en Papillot, Roast Pork "A la Cubana," Chicken and Yellow Rice "Valenciana," Filet Mignon "Chacho," Café con Leche and Flan. A gluten-free menu is available. The entrance to the restaurant and to the different rooms are wheelchair accessible.

#### RUTH'S CHRIS STEAK HOUSE:

Ruth's Chris Steak House locations can be found across the United States and elsewhere around the world. While in Tampa, we dined at the 350-seat 1700 North Westshore Blvd. location in what would mark my long awaited first review of this very famous restaurant chain.

More than 50 years ago, the "First Lady of Steak," Ruth Fertel, bought a local steak house in New Orleans, Louisiana. It was called Chris Steak House. What started as one restaurant has grown into the largest collection of upscale steak houses in the world.

Now guests routinely savor the sizzle of USDA prime steak and genuine hospitality across the globe. Their perfected broiling method and seasoning techniques ensure each cut of USDA Prime beef they serve arrives cooked to perfection and sizzling on a 500 degree plate. The menu includes seafood, appetizers, sides and desserts.

For dinner let us recommend the Porterhouse steak for two - 40 ounces of



*The seafood tower at Ruth's Chris.*

prime beef with the rich flavour of a strip and the tenderness of a filet. This was more than enough for our party of three, with some roasted cremini mushrooms and fingerling potatoes on the side. While we each had our eyes on one of the many excellent soups and salads as a pre-meal selection, instead we agreed to share a small (but it

is actually quite large) chilled seafood tower - Maine lobster, king crab legs and knuckles, colossal lump crab meat and jumbo cocktail shrimp served with both Sriracha-lime seafood and cocktail sauces. When it came to dessert, our waiter Wayne suggested we go with the crème brulee and we did so with a few spoons. Wayne was right on the mark. This restaurant was perfectly wheelchair accessible. To learn more about the legend of Ruth Fertel and Ruth's Chris Steak House, visit [RuthsChris.com](http://RuthsChris.com).

**OYSTERCATCHERS:** When on holiday we always try to find the best seafood restaurant in town. In Tampa, that would be Oystercatchers ([www.oystercatchersrestaurant.com](http://www.oystercatchersrestaurant.com)) at the Grand Hyatt at 2900 Bayport Drive. The visually stimulating water views and sunsets provide a unique environment to enjoy feature wines and appetizers. As for the menu, it highlights an array of the freshest, wild and line caught fish available, organic produce and seafood specialties with a unique and contemporary flair.

For our party of three we chose to share a number of dishes and that started with the appetizers: eight splendid oysters, an order of golden calamari fries, an arugula salad and yellowfin tuna (red in color, served medium rare from Florida's East coast). This was a great combination!

When it came to the main course, we opted to share a two-pound lobster. It came to the table completely cut up and easy to dip into the garlic butter. We also added an order of large juicy sea scallops from the Mexican Gulf, perfectly prepared and among the best I have tasted in many years.

For dessert we shared the house specialty, a slice of key lime pie and a piece of sumptuous chocolate cake. There is a ramp entrance to the restaurant (to the left of the stairs by the valet), as well as a handicapped elevator to allow guests into the lower level of the dining room.

*Mike Cohen is the editor of Inspirations. You can read an extended story about Tampa Bay at [www.sandboxworld.com/travel](http://www.sandboxworld.com/travel) and follow him on Twitter @mikecohensl. ✨*



## Adapted Travel HOLLYWOOD

## Holiday resort in Hollywood, Florida offers multitude of facilities to accommodate all needs

By Alexandra Cohen

**THE DIPLOMAT BEACH RESORT:** A number of years ago, my family joined friends for dinner at the Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood, Florida (<http://www.diplomatresort.com>). Looking around at the beautiful facilities, I distinctly recall hoping to experience the hotel in its entirety one day.

Recently, that wish came true, our visit coming soon after the completion of a \$100 million transformation of this oceanfront, all-encompassing destination resort offering a fresh new take on vacationing for all business and leisure travellers. From the Atlantic coast to the



A beautiful view of the beach from our room.

Intracoastal, the reinvented resort pays homage to the hotel's storied past as a social hub, with a modern take on design and amenities, including a luxurious spa and more than 10 new culinary concepts.

Upon entering the Diplomat, the first thing that you notice is an open concept lobby with sweeping views of the ocean via the floor-to-ceiling windows of The Hotel Bar - the property's wraparound indoor-outdoor bar.

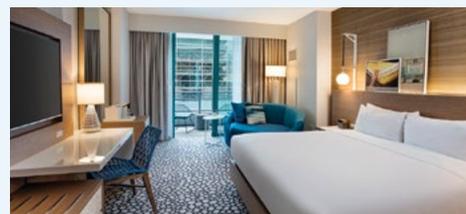
**SPECIAL NEEDS:** The hotel has 41 mobility and hearing accessible rooms, featuring one king bed or two queen doubles, and an accessible tub and/or shower. The rooms also have visual alarm and notification devices for the doorbell or door knock. The Diplomat has ramp access and elevators all throughout the property

for those with disabilities, including entrances and exits, the lobby, restaurants, pools and the spa. Both the pools and the Jacuzzis have lifts.

**ACCOMODATIONS:** The Diplomat is now part of Curio Collection by Hilton, a global set of upscale hotels handpicked for their unique character. We stayed in a gorgeous Oceanview Double Deluxe Room with a balcony, providing a beautiful and completely unobstructed view of the ocean. Wonderfully appointed, this retreat is both original and modern, with a gracious lounge area and work space as well as a generous bath with both a glass-enclosed shower and a separate deep-soaking tub. In-room indulgences – luxe robes, plush bedding and Bigelow bath amenities – enhance the experience of Florida beachside living at its finest.

**DINING OPTIONS:** The Diplomat has no shortage of exceptional dining options. We were there for four nights, and via the "Diplomat Restaurant Group" (DRG) there were no less than 10 innovative and surprising culinary destinations to choose from. Let us certainly recommend breakfast at Point Royal, a coastal restaurant also open for lunch and dinner. This is a large dynamic buffet filled with almost every breakfast option imaginable, from house-made pastries and an inventive cereal bar, to egg dishes, salads and grains.

Our first dinner was also at Point Royal (<http://www.pointroyal-fl.com>), part of famous chef Geoffrey Zakarian's approachable American cuisine, complete with indoor/outdoor seating and a grand, yet modern, Raw Bar. There were a variety of hand-crafted cocktails to choose from, and my dining partner opted for a satisfying rum passion fizz. While we looked at the menu, our fabulous server brought us some delicious cornbread and smoked



Diplomat accessible deluxe king room.

honey butter (smoked in house). Next, there was no question that we wanted to sample a seafood platter, so we opted for The Diplomat, featuring six oysters, six clams, an eight-ounce king crab, three pink shrimp, and half a Maine lobster. This was absolutely superb. We then shared some tossed heirloom lettuces, which included shaved carrots, radish, and aged sherry vinaigrette. The yellow-fin tuna tartare, with avocado and chili-sesame seed vinaigrette, was next, followed by an order of roasted Maine diver scallops, which included baby turnips, fennel, herbs and smoked fish chowder. All in all it was an amazing meal, which we capped off with the most decadent of desserts, a Black Forest meringue pie. The rich, dark chocolate pie crust was filled with a layer of sharp cherry curd, topped with light meringue rippled with dark chocolate.

The next night, we also enjoyed a superb meal at Monkital (<https://www.monkital.com>), which won the top spot for Best Hotel Restaurant in USA Today's 2017 Readers' Choice Awards. After eating there ourselves, we no doubt understand why it was selected for this honour. Celebrity chef and restaurateur Michael Schulson is at the helm; Monkital is his seventh restaurant. The menu is a contemporary take on the classic izakaya, featuring sharable small plates and sushi as well as an array of specialty cocktails and saké. Surrounding an open robatayaki kitchen in the heart of the restaurant is a private dining area overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Tucked away beyond Monkital's main dining room is Nokku, a discreet cocktail lounge with four private rooms, each having full karaoke capabilities.

What an absolute treat this was! My dining partner started off with a blooming blossom drink from the cocktail menu. We then proceeded to allow the chef to make a series of outstanding suggestions. This began with the hot Hamachi, toro caviar, and the big eye tuna special. The

Edamame dumplings were specifically recommended to us, having won the nod for Best Bites of 2017 by noted South Florida food critic Michael Mayo. To say that this dish exceeded our expectations is an absolute understatement.

The tasting continued with some Rob-itayaki lobster tail, skirt steak and short rib skewers, a duck scrapple bao bun, a tempura shrimp taco, an aged New York strip, and broiled sea bass with aioli and snap peas. Just when we thought that the meal could not possibly get any better, our server brought us two excellent desserts. First came the fruit loop ice cream and almond joy, which came in mini cones. Next was a chocolate mousse with miniature brownies, cherries, and ice cream on top. What a meal! If you are anywhere in the vicinity of Hollywood, Florida, you must come to the Diplomat to dine.

**ACTIVITIES:** In addition to the two beachfront pools, there is also jet skiing, ocean kayaking, paddleboard rentals, and the property's newest addition, the Dip + Slide water play area.

**THE CABANA EXPERIENCE:** Exclusively designed for The Diplomat, specialty cabanas created by fashion designer Trina Turk are available for rent on the lower floor of the pool deck, providing a relaxing and stylish oasis for the day. We were fortunate to spend an entire day in a private poolside cabana where we were pampered by the pool concierge and spoiled with generous amenities and a comfortable haven.

**BOUCHER BROTHERS ON THE BEACH:** We were thrilled to discover that The Diplomat partners with the award-winning Boucher Brothers Management to pamper guests during their day on the beautiful Hollywood Beach. We got to spend a day lounging in private daybeds and relaxing on a chaise for a luxurious take on 'fun in the sun'. The team from the Boucher Brothers could not have been nicer in setting us up, and they in fact came back several times over our stay to adjust the umbrellas and make sure everything was okay. Lunch and drinks were available right at our chairs. This service is available daily from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. To reserve, call 1 (954) 602-6000. For more information, visit [www.diplomatresort.com](http://www.diplomatresort.com). ❀

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# All fun at the Fun For All Fair!

By Wendy Singer

On April 14, well over 100 families came to LaurenHill Academy Junior Campus for the Fun for All Fair, to play and explore adapted and inclusive recreational services. The site was buzzing with activity from start to finish.

Children and adults alike had their choice of activities to try. Some explored wheelchair basketball, others tried their serve



Fun For All guest plays wheelchair boccia with CIVA. (Photo, Michelle McSweeney)



A family having fun at the Fun For All Fair.

at tennis. There was dancing, cheerleading, karate, taekwondo, music, soccer, face painting, arts and crafts. Delicious snacks that were generously donated by our sponsors were enjoyed by all. We were delighted to provide our guests with a place to feel at home, learn all about activities that are available, and meet the people that offer these services.

Linda Mahler, *Inspirations'* coordinator of educational outreach, and chair of the Fun for All Fair, had a vision which, under her direction, was executed with great fi-



Fun For All guest playing at the fair. (Photo, Michelle McSweeney)



Fun For All guests have fun playing tennis.

ness. She attended to every detail in order to enhance the experience for families, and make the children feel very special. It is thanks to Linda that the Fair was such a meaningful event.

On the eve of the event, and event day, we worked with an amazing team of students from LaurenHill Academy Junior Campus. Led by their incredible teacher Andrew Adams, they anticipated our every need and helped us at every turn. We thank the LaurenHill and EMSB administrations for their support of our event and our mission.

With too many highlights to share, we have put together a photo album which you can enjoy on our Facebook page. Stay tuned for our end of school online edition for a full spread about the fair. For a full list of our 30 exhibitors, visit our website.

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