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Dolphin Therapy a gift for Atara



Atara Stolovitsky with Bonnie the Dolpin and therapist Paul at the Curacao Dolphin Therapy & Research Center. (Courtesy of Curacao Dolphin Therapy Center)

See page 17 for more about this visit

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Tamara Novak, éducatrice hors pair, se mérite le prix de Pourvoyeur de soins d'Inspirations

Par Emmanuelle Assor

Chaque année, depuis 4 ans, le prix de Pourvoyeur de soins d'Inspirations est décerné à une personne qui s'est illustrée en aidant d'une façon unique des jeunes aux besoins spéciaux. Cette année, le prix revient à Tamara Novak, une éducatrice dévouée et motivée faisant partie de l'équipe d'intervention en situation de crise à l'école spécialisée Peter Hall. Tamara est aussi responsable du Défi Sportif, sorte de jeux olympiques particuliers: elle organise les pratiques de l'équipe de hockey intérieur, motive les élèves et gère l'événement annuel qui remporte un vif succès.

Quand elle a appris qu'elle recevait le prix de Pourvoyeur de soins d'Inspirations, Tamara était surprise et gênée car elle n'avait aucune idée qu'elle avait été nommée par la directrice adjointe de l'école, Mme Desbiens-Leighton : «Jamais je n'aurais pensé recevoir un tel honneur. Nous faisons tous un travail d'équipe et c'est grâce aux gens exceptionnels avec qui je travaille que je suis honorée aujourd'hui. Sans eux, rien ne



Président directeur général Jean Laliberté, Tamara Novak, directrice adjointe Alexandre Desbiens-Leighton, directrice Maryvonne Robert.



Peter Hall équipe d'intervention en situation de crise: Maxime Desjardins, Richard Meloche, Tommy Gentile, Tamara Novak, Jean Paul Arsenault, Katherine Welburn.

serait possible» dit-elle avec humilité.

Aujourd'hui, après des années de travail dans divers établissements pour clientèle aux besoins spéciaux, Tamara s'occupe surtout de gérer des jeunes en temps de crise à l'école Peter Hall. «Mon rôle est d'offrir un soutien au professeur qui vit un moment de transition difficile avec l'un de ses étudiants. Mon travail, je le fais sans jamais juger l'autre. Je ne considère pas l'enfant comme ayant une étiquette spéciale, pour moi ce sont tous des étudiants comme les autres» affirme-t-elle simplement.

Ce qui caractérise Tamara c'est son humilité, sa douceur et son sourire radieux. Elle m'explique que pour elle chaque enfant est unique et qu'elle trouve en elle la force tous les jours pour aider ces jeunes qui en ont tant besoin. Pourquoi ce choix de carrière? «Ma philosophie dans la vie est de tout accepter avec amour. J'adore être avec des gens, me connecter à eux. Il y a 25 ans, j'ai fait une superbe rencontre avec un conseiller en carrière et depuis je travaille auprès des jeunes ayant des besoins spéciaux.»

Comment gère-t-elle les défis au quotidien? «Je reste calme devant les jeunes et je gère ce qui vient vers moi, peu importe ce que c'est. Au cours des années, j'ai souvent vu les enfants à leur pire mais je sais qu'ils sont tous capables de s'en sortir avec de l'aide et de la compréhension.»

Au-delà des crises et des difficultés, Tamara prend grand plaisir à s'occuper du Défi Sportif et de l'équipe de hockey intérieur de Peter Hall qui s'est distinguée cette année grâce à son support indéfectible. «Bien sûr, j'apprécie mon travail mais je ne me vois pas comme une sauveuse. C'est ma vocation de faire mon métier. Dans la vie, on peut toujours se comparer aux autres, en mieux ou en pire, mais je trouve du sens dans les petites choses : un sourire d'enfant, un câlin, savoir que j'ai aidé grâce à quelque chose que j'ai fait ou que j'ai dit. Personne n'a de réponse, nous faisons juste du mieux que nous pouvons. Je ne pourrais simplement pas imaginer ma vie sans ces jeunes et



Tamara Novak avec Jonathan Pepin et Justyn McBrien.

l'amour qu'ils me donnent. Cela me donne de l'énergie pour aller de l'avant.»

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

Tout a commencé à Montréal en 1957 lors de la formation d'un petit club d'investissement. Faisant œuvre de pionnière, Fonds Dynamique offrait déjà au grand public des conseils professionnels. Devenue l'une des sociétés de gestion de patrimoine les plus réputées au Canada, elle propose aujourd'hui une gamme de produits et services des plus complètes, y compris des fonds à capital fixe et variable, des produits assortis d'avantages fiscaux, des programmes à honoraires ainsi que des solutions personnalisées destinées aux investisseurs bien nantis. Elle donne ainsi accès aux principales industries, régions et démarches de placement.

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Dr. Temple Grandin “Sees things her way”

By Wendy Singer

Dr. Temple Grandin is known worldwide for shedding light on the autistic brain; her insights having helped countless families better understand their loved ones living with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs). It is therefore no surprise that over 900 people came out to hear her speak at the Gold Centre’s Current Trends in Autism conference at La Tohu last November.



Temple Grandin with Nathalie Garcin, Executive Director, Gold Centre.

Dr. Grandin was diagnosed with autism at the age of two and a half, after her mother, who saw her potential, rejected a prior diagnosis of brain damage. A PhD and professor in animal welfare and behaviour at Colorado State University, 66-year-old Grandin is known for revolutionizing the cattle industry.

Her books, including *The Autistic Brain*, and *Thinking in Pictures*, and the HBO movie titled *Temple Grandin* featuring actress Claire Danes, that shares her life story, have brought widespread, global attention to how she used her autism to succeed in life and how she has achieved celebrity status as an autism advocate.

Grandin discussed her own struggles with autism and the need for early intervention. “Many kids with autism can become productive members of society,” says Grandin. “Take them to real places, like coffee shops, restaurants and stores to socialize them.”

“Autism is a big spectrum. On one end we’ve got Albert Einstein and Steve Jobs. On the other end you’ve got someone who’s going to remain a lot more handicapped. If you don’t work on these kids really early, you’re going to have a bunch of kids that don’t go anywhere.”

Nathalie Garcin, Executive Director of The Gold Centre reflected Grandin’s words. “We have a wonderful window of opportunity to affect change and increase the quality of life of these kids and the family unit,” said Garcin. “We’re using the right intervention approach with kids. The problem is lack of funding and social awareness and not making this a priority for the province of Quebec.”

During the question and answer period at the conference, a mother discussed her teenage son’s problems with math. In asking what he is ‘good’ at, Grandin discovered his skill at helping out in the family business. “Focus on his skill, not the weak areas,” responded Grandin. “This will give him the ability to become a contributing member of society with a career.”

Grandin’s visit resonated with Montrealers, many of which were beyond thrilled to have the chance to meet her. A role model for kids with autism, Grandin’s messages are clear: “I want to motivate the quirky kids that are different. I want to help them succeed. And let them know that they can succeed.”



Clara wearing her funky shades!

“See Things My Way” – a campaign to change the futures of people with Autism Spectrum Disorders and intellectual disabilities

By Wendy Singer

Dr. Temple Grandin teaches us that to understand how people with autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) and intellectual disabilities think we have to look through their lenses. This is precisely the inspiration behind the Miriam Foundation’s innovative fundraising and awareness campaign *See Things My Way*, which was launched during the Current Trends in Au-

“I realized quite a while ago that we needed to fix the system and that as a foundation working in the area of intellectual disability and autism spectrum disorders, we have an opportunity to be a leader, not only in Quebec but across Canada,” shares Warren Greenstone, Chief Executive Officer, Miriam Foundation, when discussing the impetus for this campaign.

“The only way you can be a leader is to be a visionary. We’re fortunate to have a great



The ‘See Things My Way’ campaign launch at La Tohu. With Joël Paquin, Nathalie Garcin, Aldo Bensadoun, Warren Greenstone, Diane Guerrera, Jean Coutu, Sylvie Coutu, Sal Guerrera. (Photo credit, Julian Haber. Courtesy of the Miriam Foundation)

tism Conference at La Tohu on November 6th, 2013.

Esteemed campaign co-chairs Aldo Bensadoun, founder and executive chairman of the ALDO Group, and drug store mogul Jean Coutu, were at the conference to launch See Things My Way.

This is a two-tiered campaign that aims to raise \$25 million dollars over five years to improve the care system and change the futures of people with ASDs and intellectual disabilities. This includes eliminating waiting times for early diagnosis and treatment, professional training, research and ancillary clinical services like job creation, and respite care.

group of strategic thinkers around our table,” he added.

This April, during Autism Awareness Month, See Things My Way reminded everyone to talk about autism. People logged on to www.seethingsmyway.org to create funky virtual glasses, share their photos on social media, and encourage donations on the website.

“We’re trying to raise funds to fill all these gaps, but we’re also trying to raise awareness,” says Greenstone. “I feel we’re on the edge of something amazing. We’re going to raise a lot of money but also we need to push the government in order to make some very positive change.”



EMSB Work-Oriented Training program paves pathway for students with special needs

By Elaine Cohen

In 1999, Dorothy Shaw welcomed a challenging position as Career Advisor at John Grant, an EMSB alternative high school devoted to preparing students with mild to severe learning difficulties to integrate in the workplace.

In addition to a university degree and certification in special care counseling, Shaw had prior experience working with youth and adults at vocational centres and community organizations.

“When I started we had 15 students in our work preparation and placement program and I trained, prepared, placed, followed and evaluated every one,” Shaw recalls. “Now we have 70 students at John Grant going out on work-study every week. There are 107 students at the school, 15 teachers, and support staff. We seek employers willing to take students in establishments, such

as variety shops, pharmacies, retirement centres, daycares, hair salons, garages, factories and offices.”

For the past two years, Shaw, who is retiring in June, has shared her advisory role with Sissi Séguret. Like Shaw, Séguret has prior vocational experience in guidance counseling and holds a Master’s degree.

The EMSB conducts Work -Oriented Training Path (WOTP) programs at John Grant and LINKS high schools in Côte Saint-Luc and Ahuntsic, respectively. The three-year Prework Training program is open to students with special needs, ages 15 to 18. Principal James Fequet and Vice-Principal George Koutsoulis work at both schools.

The first year, students are not placed outside but explore careers at school. They are taught interview skills, work etiquette and more. This preparatory period is enhanced with courses such as English, French, Mathematics and Physical Education.



Career Advisors Sissy Séguret (left) and Dorothy Shaw describe the Work-Oriented Training Path program. (Photo, Elaine Cohen)

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Year II, students delve further into work environments and they are placed outside the school one day a week. They also hone daily living skills. By year III, students are exposed to the work environment for 50 percent of the program. In 2010, the Quebec government responded to the EMSB’s recommendation for certification. Students must complete 2,700 hours of the three-year program and fulfill 900 hours in the work placement portion to earn a MELS Prework Training Certificate.

Furthermore, students, 18 to 21, may opt to engage in the Job Orientation Program (JOP). In this program, the government grants Semiskilled Trade Certificates. To qualify for the latter certification, the individual must complete 900 hours of the program and succeed in the 375-hour work placement portion.

Regardless of the program, students receive individual attention and follow-up support. “We not only teach students how to conduct themselves in an interview, we also take them to meet employers and sit with them for the entire interview,” Shaw said. “Students receive weekly visits from teachers.

Once the student is placed, we’re there for support in case any difficulties arise.”

Séguret concurs. “Every student has different needs and there is no formula that fits all. We go out of our way to find a job taking an individual’s strengths, limitations and interests into consideration.”

Shaw commends the John Grant team for their time and patience. “We are like a small community. We know every student by name.” The career advisors organize a yearly employer appreciation luncheon and other events such as the Transitioning Towards Independence Resource Fair.

“I’ve witnessed students become more autonomous and gain self-esteem,” Shaw reflects. “Sometimes they surpass our expectations. One former student is an assistant manager at a pharmacy. Someone we placed a few years ago was nominated store employee of the year at his workplace. It’s gratifying to have been part of the process.”

For information, visit www.jghs.qc.ca or phone (514) 484-4161.



Non-Suicidal Self-Injury

By Despina Vassiliou

In a packed auditorium at the EMSB head office, Dr. Nancy Heath, Professor at McGill University enthralled the audience with the most recent research-based information on Non-Suicidal Self-Injury (NSSI). NSSI, she explained, is a deliberate and direct action to destruct one's body tissue. As the name implies, there is no suicidal intent, nor is NSSI a socially sanctioned action such as tattooing and piercing. The primary reason believed to be behind NSSI is an attempt to cope with difficult feelings.

It is very difficult to identify an individual



Drawing by Rikee Gutherz-Madoff

who engages in NSSI as they may come from any background, may have a good relationship with their parents, and may or may not suffer from a mental illness. NSSI is not easily identifiable but the primary risk factor is that the individual is struggling to cope with stress. They may have had difficulty communicating their feelings well with others. Although there is a slightly greater tendency for girls to engage in NSSI during the elementary or high school years, many boys do too. Among university students, however, there is no gender difference.

The most common methods for NSSI include cutting, burning, bruising, and scratching. The injuries may leave behind scars that the individual often tries to hide by wearing long sleeves or pants (especially in warm weather) and/or bracelets. As a parent you may have noticed that your son or daughter has withdrawn from family, friends, and peers – they tend to be alone more often.

As parents, finding out that your son or daughter engages in NSSI may be very challenging and difficult to understand. Many parents feel shock, confusion and worry, anger, sadness, and guilt. These common reactions, however, may make it more difficult to address the issue with your child which must be done. Identifying your feelings and being aware of them before you speak to your son or daughter is important. For instance, if you are angry about the situation it may not be the best time to speak to him or her. Timing is important. You and your child must both be ready to speak about the issue

in a private and comfortable location. Be honest about how concerned you are and explain why. Try and understand what your son or daughter is going through by asking open-ended questions and using a calm and supportive tone without judgment and reassure them that no punishment will follow. If the conversation is going well, then you may ask questions about the self-injury such as for how long it has been going on, how often, and how does it make him or her feel. Please do not ask for your son or daughter to show you the scars because this may be interpreted as an invasion of privacy and can be very distressing.

If your child is resistant to speak about the NSSI, it is important to respect that decision. Simply repeat your concerns and inform him or her that you will try and have the conversation at another time and follow through by following the tips listed above.

If your child does engage in self-injury (NSSI) it is imperative to seek professional help by either speaking to the family doctor or a mental health professional (e.g., psychologist). This is something that cannot be treated on your own.

For more information please visit the SiOS website at <http://sioutreach.org/>. Despina Vassiliou is a psychologist at the English Montreal School Board.

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Dining out with your child with special needs: Tips for a positive experience

By Lori Rubin

Having a relaxing meal in a nice restaurant can often be a harrowing experience for families with young children. Short attention spans, limited food preferences, together with the demands of parents to “Stop yelling!”, “Finish your food!” or “Sit still!” can often result in that familiar parental mantra, “Never again!” Add to this the particular needs and restrictions of children with special needs, and what could be a pleasant diversion from the daily routine of preparing and serving meals at home can frequently deteriorate into an embarrassing and frustrating dining experience.

Children with special needs often do not respond to the requests of parents to behave “properly” in a restaurant, nor to the angry glares of neighbouring diners and wait staff, who have certain expectations of how children should behave. While all families are entitled to enjoy a meal out, other patrons

also have the right to enjoy their meal in a quiet setting.

Most children, if brought to a child-friendly restaurant, can be entertained with crayons and colouring books, electronic games, or standard behavioural prompts from parents, such as, “please speak in an *indoor voice*,” or “we will have to leave now if this behaviour continues”. Many children with special needs, however, become so over-stimulated, hyperactive, or overloaded by sensory input in the environment (noise, smells, etc.), that they simply cannot contain themselves in an appropriate manner. To no fault of their own, they begin to display loud or obnoxious behaviours in response to being placed in a setting that is too much for them to cope with.

The following is a non-exhaustive list of some things to remember when planning a restaurant outing with a child with special needs:

- Whenever possible, choose a restaurant

that has food choices that fall within the restrictive eating pattern of the child. (e.g. Chicken nuggets rather than curried Thai chicken).

- Go to the restaurant *before* the child is “starving”.
- Bring some of his/her favourite games/toys/iPod, and some items that have a calming affect.
- Create a *social story* that explains appropriate restaurant behaviour – read it aloud several times before leaving for the meal. Remind the child of the upcoming event throughout the day.
- If the child typically uses pictos/visual prompts (often used for children on the autism spectrum) to be reminded of what they need to do, bring those to the restaurant in order to maintain consistency.
- Role play with your child leading up to the meal, demonstrating how to use manners and display acceptable behaviours while eating.
- Avoid long, group dinners where he/she

is expected to stay seated until the meal is over.

- Ask the server if substitutions can be made (e.g. French fries instead of rice).
- Avoid choosing restaurants that you know may trigger your child’s individual sensory profile.
- Invite one of the child’s friends to come along – the two children can often entertain each other while waiting for the courses to be served.
- Afterward, use the experience as a *teaching tool* rather than just a reminder of bad behaviour.

Restaurant dining can be a blessing to overworked and tired parents and a fun activity for all children. It is the *mindful planning* of this type of outing that can make the difference between a pleasant mealtime experience and a tearful battle of wills.

Lori Rubin is a Behaviour Management Specialist at the English Montreal School Board.

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Inclusion is a right

By Marie-Eve Veilleux

I don't remember a lot of the battles my mom had to fight before I could fight my own, but I know one thing: she always made sure I grew up in a regular environment and that's probably the greatest gift she ever gave me.

I have juvenile arthritis, so I have difficulty moving. When it became too difficult to ride the bus to school, the first solution offered was to drive me to a special school for people with disabilities in Montreal. My mom was firm: her daughter was already isolated physically; she would not be isolated socially as well. After graduating elementary school, the automatic option was to send me to a school with specialized classes instead of my neighbourhood secondary school – because it was just easier. Once again, my mom had to stand her ground. Her daughter would study at her local school.

My mom had to fight twice, but some of my friends went through worse situations. Their intelligence was questioned because of their disability since their body, their language or their movements were different. One of my friends was refused access to his local elementary school because he needed help for things like putting on his coat. After receiving many refusals, even directly from the Minister of Education, his mom decided to enrol him in a private school where he was accepted. In a different region, another friend had access to an attendant five days a week to help her in school. One year, the

budget was cut and they would pay the attendant only four days per week. Can you tell me what my friend was supposed to do on the fifth school day?

Grouping services and resources under one roof may save money, but what are the consequences for students who are put in ghettos at such a critical age where they build their character? What is the impact on their aspirations? And what is the transition to a regular CEGEP like for these kids who spent all those years in a parallel system? I truly believe that my education in a regular environment allowed me to feel like I had my place in society as much as anyone else in my class. And when the time came that I needed to fight my way through life with a disability, I had all the tools I needed.

Thanks to all the battles my mom has fought for me since I was born, I am now allergic to situations where society makes me feel like I am a second class citizen. If I can contribute to helping society stop thinking of people with disabilities as outsiders, I will have succeeded.

Marie-Eve Veilleux is Translation coordinator for the Canadian Longitudinal Study on Aging. She is also pursuing graduate studies in Bioethics.



Jay Jones-Doyle

Challenge, Accepted!

Personal growth is a funny thing. The opportunities for it can present themselves at very odd times, but intriguingly they consistently come from the same people.

Recently, I was having a housewarming party and one of my friends pulled me aside. She told me that she had been in contact with the organizers of the Spartan Race and that she had some news. The Spartan Race, for those who don't know, is an absolutely epic obstacle course. She informed me that the organizers had given their enthusiastic approval to make an adapted version of the course for people with disabilities, and she wanted me to be her partner. It took about two seconds for me to agree.

I'll take a moment to give some context. I have Cerebral Palsy, so as you can imagine I am not exactly the race-running type. I tend to be more of the race-trundling type => So why did I agree? It had a lot to do with the person who asked. My friend Sherin is one of those people who loves to challenge herself. I first met her when she was the President of the John Molson Graduate Student Society, and she was the one who encouraged me to run as her replacement. I remember feeling the exact same way in that moment as I did when she asked me to run the race: totally out of my comfort zone, momentarily insecure, but also incredibly honoured that someone I respect so much thought this highly of me and my capability.

In life you will meet a select group of people who inspire you to be more, to push the

boundaries of what you feel that you can do. These people are special, so take good care to cherish them. I have been lucky enough to have a handful of these people in my life, and I try to make them aware of how much they mean to me. So on May 25th I will run, climb, jump, fall, stumble, and trundle my way across that obstacle course and no matter how I place it will be a win. It will be a win because I will be pushing the boundaries of what I thought possible, and because I know that by deciding to tackle this challenge I will forever be a stronger person. Thanks Sherin – you are spectacular!

(On a random but related note, watch this: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q5nVqeVhgQE> – This really sums up my attitude on life =>).

Jay Jones-Doyle has Cerebral Palsy. He is currently the Sustainability Projects Fund Administrator at McGill, and was previously an intern with the UN's Business and Biodiversity programme. He was the 2010-2011 President of the John Molson Graduate Students' Association, and was named one of Quebec's top three graduate students of 2011 as well as Concordia's Outstanding Student of the Year. He sits on the Board of Directors of the Concordia University Alumni Association, and is the Marketing Coordinator for the Amal Foundation. Finally, he is an accomplished motivational speaker, a championship-winning junior hockey coach, and is the proud father of an nine year-old boy.



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Specialisterne Canada: Hiring, training, supporting autism

By Wendy Singer

The promotional video that Specialisterne (pronounced spesh-uh-list-tern-ah) hosts on their website demonstrates how easily a perceived deficit can be turned into an asset. The statement ‘Some people find my tone rather offensive’ becomes positive when modified to ‘I am honest and straightforward’.

Thorkil Sonne founded Specialisterne 10 years ago in Denmark after realizing that his son who has autism would not be able to get a job that met his intelligence level. To harness the talent that this population offers, he created an information technology (IT) consulting firm focusing on business. Specialisterne now operates in 11 countries with a global initiative of enabling one million jobs of all sorts worldwide.

Specialisterne Canada set up shop in Toronto in November 2013 with the goal of changing the employment landscape and placing 10,000 Canadians with autism in meaningful jobs. They aim to help businesses of all types (manufacturing, education, finance, IT, the arts, etc) to recognize, value and integrate autistic talent into their workforce. As Specialisterne explains in their Canada’s #First100People video, “All businesses can benefit from employing people that think and communicate differently. Right now this talent pool is largely untapped. If we can get businesses to approach things a little differently, we can change that.”

Three Montrealers have already been recruited for jobs at SAP Software Solutions.

Sara Winter, Vice President, Community, Education and Outreach at Specialisterne Canada explains that businesses are starting to become interested in hiring people with autism not because it’s a good thing to do

but because it’s a need. “We inform businesses that they can’t find this talent anywhere else, and it is what they need to bring their business to the next level,” said Winter.

Alan Kriss, CEO of Specialisterne Canada, brings over 20 years of business management experience to the company. “We are not competing with other non-profit or autism organizations, we are competing with other businesses,” he explained to a captivated crowd at the Montreal Autism in Motion Conference and Exhibit: Advancing With Autism on March 30, 2014.

Specialisterne finds interested business partners and jobs first. Then they find candidates. The traditional interview process, a frequent barrier to employment, is eliminated. Instead, candidates are brought together in small groups where they can be comfortable and creative. Using different types of technology (LEGO® Mindstorms, for example) as frameworks for the candidates

to initiate, innovate, interact, and problem solve, they begin to see how people work, what motivates them, and what they can bring to a job.

Once placed in a job, support is maintained with employees and employers to ensure that all parties understand the particular needs of the person with autism.

During his presentation, Kriss shared a quote from SAP: “Innovation comes from the edges. Only by employing people who think differently and spark innovation will SAP be prepared to handle the challenges of the 21st century.”

Check out Specialisterne Canada’s #First100People video at <http://vimeo.com/90819691>, outlining their campaign to hire their first 100 people in Canada. For information about Specialisterne Canada visit <http://ca.specialisterne.com> or contact info@specialisterne.ca.

DM FAMILY & SCHOOL SERVICES: A SUPPORTIVE PLACE TO THINK, LEARN, & GROW

Client who I will call “Lucas” was talented, charming and a natural athlete. But that is not what defined him: He was always in trouble for his explosive behaviour. Lucas was easily frustrated. At home, he annoyed his siblings, and upset his parents as he had difficulty waiting for anything: dinner, his turn to play with a toy, or for his favorite TV show. Where Lucas went, conflict followed. It’s difficult for Lucas to share anything with his brother. It always had to be “his show”, or “his choice of game” — or the screaming began.

ried that he struggles to regulate his emotions and cannot resolve any conflicts with his peers. He insists on being first in line, first to choose his team, first to assist his teacher in distributing papers. The teacher called to say that their son needs help dealing with his emotions and developing frustration tolerance.

At first his parents didn’t quite agree... they felt that with some time their son would outgrow these behaviors. But they definitely knew there was a problem when they had to cancel a family outing because of bad weather.

floor crying and screaming.

Lucas’s parents accepted the school’s recommendation that he participate in Dina Dinosaur* School to develop his social skills. They jumped at the chance to participate in the Incredible Years* Parent Training Program so they could support his learning at home. Lucas learnt how to control his emotions and how to solve conflicts. Last week he was even invited to a birthday party!

Most importantly, his parents and teachers can see that he is happier at home and at

school.

Every now and then we all need an opportunity to reflect, recharge and rethink our next move. Sometimes it helps to talk to someone you can trust.

DM Family & School Services work together with young people, their families, schools, & communities to build partnerships & find solutions!

Mona Segal, psychotherapist, can be reached at 514.483.9339

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At school, Lucas’s teachers are wor-

Lucas spent two hours rolling around the

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- ◆ Youth wanting support in relationships & friendships
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- ◆ Couple experiencing a time of difficulty
- ◆ Parent of young child wanting support
- ◆ Family working through a separation, divorce, or life change and wanting support

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Inspirational Book Review

For the Benefit of Those Who See by Rosemary Mahoney (Little, Brown, \$30)

By Stuart Nulman

During her work as an English teacher at the International Institute for Social Entrepreneurs (IISE) in Kerala, India, author Rosemary Mahoney visited a local government grade school for the blind with Chelsea, who was one of her students. When they met with its principal -- who is also blind -- he told them that he never uses his white cane, because "blind people think that a white cane marks them as inferior."

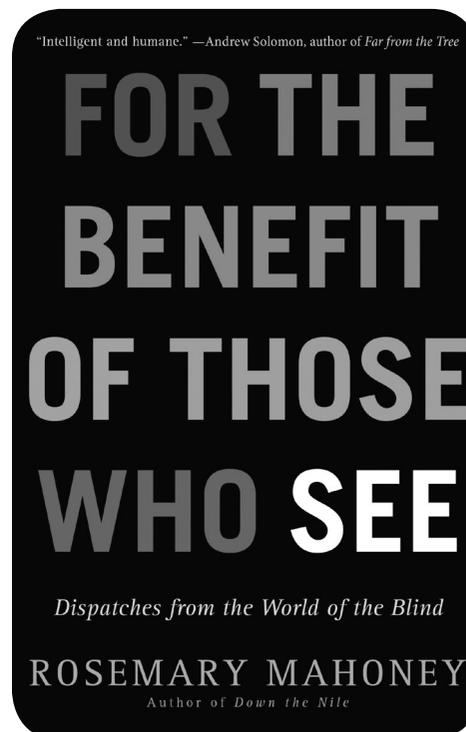
The principal's response prompted Chelsea to chastise him for his rather ignorant remark. "You want to be seen as a normal person in society, so you won't allow yourself to benefit from the use of the white cane," she said. "But blind people should be proud of their white canes. We should be proud of our blindness and not try to hide it."

This is one of the many uplifting stories that

make up Mahoney's compelling book *For the Benefit of Those Who See*, which gives a fascinating, yet humane, portrait of the world of the blind.

Mahoney concentrates her story on two institutions that help and educate blind people, especially from Third World countries, so that they could successfully integrate themselves into today's society: the above mentioned IISE in India, and Braille Without Borders in Tibet. What makes these institutions so remarkable to learn about is not only their humane missions to educate the blind and give them a sense of dignity and respect, but the people who inhabit these institutions.

They come from all over the globe, whether it be Asia, Africa or parts of Europe; however, it's their personal stories of how the blind are mistreated in their respected home countries, and their courage to rise up from such tragedies that make the book so com-



elling and affirming to read. There are Victor, James and Johnson from Liberia, where blind people are regarded as people with voodoo powers, and they each survived the horrors and devastation of the civil war there; and there's Jayne and Lucy, two lively best friends from Kenya whose vision were severely damaged by albinism; they told of how albinos in Kenya are seen as having magical powers, and are killed and mutilated, so that their body parts can be sold at a high price, in order to be used towards the making of potions and medicines that would offer magical cures.

The common bond of the people whom Mahoney taught was not only the suffering and prejudice they experienced due to their blindness, but also how they didn't allow that prejudice and suffering to prevent them from carving out a normal, productive life. Their endless positive spirit and determination towards making a better life for themselves and their fellow blind people in their respective native countries easily infects the reader with that same energetic spirit.

"The Eternal Painting"



By Abhishek Salunke

I am a beggar under the setting sun.

I watch the sun set and the colors shoot like the universe painting on a big canvas.

I beg the sunset for my big chance to paint and to create.

I still get no answers from the sky up above and I still come with hope that one day, the setting sun will give me the golden opportunity to paint with its colors, so I may see my painting in the sky till the day I die.

For the Benefit of Those Who See is a fascinating, well-researched book that tells in simple language the human side of the world of the blind. If it teaches the reader one thing, it's that because there are 285 million people all over the world who do not have the ability to see, it doesn't mean that they don't have the ability to build a productive life for themselves. It's something that those who have their sight should no longer turn a blind eye.

To read Stuart's extended book review, visit 'Online Extra' at www.inspirationsnews.com.



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YM-YWHA adapts to needs with the YCC Special Needs Family Camp

For over 100 years, the YM-YWHA has been providing meaningful programming and services for the Community. From our athletics facilities to arts and craft areas, we offer an inviting place for members of the special needs community. People feel safe and welcome here, they feel they belong, and the Y community would not be the same without them.

For years, the Marlene and Joel King Special Needs Department has catered to the specific needs of its members, and more importantly it has adapted as it has grown. The mandate of the department is

to adapt, foster growth, inspire, empower and to provide respite. The Y has taken this mantra to heart and has taken a pro-active approach to ensuring that current and future offerings are relevant to the needs of its members. In fact, it holds an annual Bridge tournament in support of the Special Needs Department, as well as an annual Y Cycle for Special Needs ride that fundraises specifically to endow funds that benefit the department.

From Horizons day camp to visual art classes, to a drop-in centre and integration and sensitization groups, the Y is always inviting and innovating. Newest in the line-up is the YCC SPECIAL NEEDS Family Camp that will run in August. This unique

camp (the only one of its kind in Canada) is for families with special needs children and their siblings, and will take place at the Harry Bronfman Y Country Camp. It caters to the whole family, allowing members to enjoy the experience of summer camp as a family unit and also separately, in a warm, welcoming atmosphere, with private cabins, and exclusive use of the camp facilities and activities.

As Julie Kristof, Y supporter and mother of Horizons camper, Miriam, put it: "The staff here really have a pulse on the needs of the special needs community and the individuals, and seem to be catering their programming to meet those needs. The family camp for families who have a child

with special needs gives Miriam a real opportunity to be able to experience sleep away camp in the country the same way that my son does. So we're able to be together as a family, have family time, take care of her in the way that she needs to be taken care of, but at the same time she has her independence and is integrated into a wider community."

YM-YWHA 514.737.6551: Special Needs Department: Julie Longval, ext. 235. Y Cycle: Lara Goldenberg, ext. 228. YCC SPECIAL NEEDS Family Camp: Sid Milech, ext. 262. www.ymywaha.com

YM-YWHA Special Needs Programming... This is Y.

Qi Gong Massage – An Unusually Effective Therapy for ASD



By Stephanie Winterford

Over the years, we've been introduced to countless therapies designed to help our family and my son, who has Autism, deal with the disorder more effectively. All of our

therapists have been incredible, helping us to cope with a disorder that is so ubiquitous that sometimes I forget how to interact with people who don't have to deal with special needs on a constant basis. Therapy trends evolve constantly; it can be hard to keep up. But if there's one thing that can be said

about the special needs community, it has to be that it provides its members with a network of information. And so it was that, through the Inspirations community, we were put in touch with Occupational Therapist Sophie Durocher-Noel, who introduced us to Qi Gong massage for children with Autism.

Loosely translated, Qi Gong means "working with energy". Scientific research has shown that the Qi Gong massage can substantially diminish the effects of Autism in children and young adults. To begin, we would train with Sophie in our house over a five month period and learn to give Zachary a specially designed daily massage which would target sensory issues, behavior, social and language skills, and stress at home.

Initially, I had low expectations as to the efficacy of the massage – I mean, it was a massage for heaven's sake. I was just thrilled to have another adult at my house twice a week during the summer, when no school and lack of routine generally left me feeling helpless and

exhausted. But as the Qi Gong continued, the changes were startling. Zachary's independence increased drastically: he began to dress himself, go to the bathroom alone, and he started to wash his own hair. Stress levels lowered noticeably – our summer of Qi Gong was the first summer of Zach's life where we didn't call my parents to come and help us cope. In September, Zach's teachers found the transformation remarkable, and wanted to learn more about the therapy.

Children with Autism constantly impress me with their capacity to adapt: to rules, surroundings, therapies. For Zach, Qi Gong massage was exceptional because it was the first time that a therapy had been designed to adapt to him. Two years later, we still do Qi Gong at home.

If you would like to learn more, Sophie Durocher-Noel (Occupational/Qi Gong Therapist) can be reached at sophie@massageqi-gong.com or 514-266-8196. For information visit www.massageqi-gong.com.



La CSEM et le CRDITED de Montréal : une complémentarité essentielle pour les jeunes TED à risque de rupture de service

Par Manon Lusignan ps.éd et Tania Piperni M.Ed

S'inspirant directement des principes de l'Entente de complémentarité des services entre les réseaux MSSS et MELS, la collaboration entre la Commission Scolaire English-Montréal (CSEM) et le Centre de réadaptation en déficience intellectuelle et troubles envahissants du développement de Montréal (CRDITED de Montréal) a pris de l'ampleur au fil des ans, et tout particulièrement au cours de la dernière année scolaire. En effet, l'automne dernier, la CSEM a amorcé des travaux de concert avec le CRDITED de Montréal visant à établir une ligne de communication efficace entre nos deux organisations, afin de que tous les jeunes aient accès aux services requis au moment requis, et d'éviter ainsi que certains soient laissés sans réponse à leurs besoins, en rupture de service ou à risque de rupture.

C'est dans cet esprit que des moyens ont été déployés afin de faciliter la réintégration d'un jeune qui était en rupture de fonctionnement dans une école de la CSEM.

Cette situation a forcé la réflexion sur la création d'une zone de collaboration entre les organisations concernées qui a permis

de mettre en œuvre tous les éléments requis pour amorcer un premier projet avec l'école Parkdale à Ville Saint-Laurent. Ce projet vise à mettre en place des mécanismes de concertation efficaces entre l'équipe-école et l'équipe clinique du CRDITED, de même que tous les partenaires impliqués auprès des jeunes concernés. Ces travaux mèneront progressivement à l'implantation d'un continuum de services intégrés respectant la mission de chacun, et ce, dans le meilleur intérêt des jeunes et de leur famille.

D'autre part, les deux mêmes équipes ont travaillé conjointement, en collaboration avec l'école Pierre-de-Coubertin de Saint-Léonard, dans le cadre de la Welcoming Class, une classe d'accueil destinée aux élèves de la maternelle et de la première année qui présentent un diagnostic TED. Des rencontres entre les parents et l'équipe-école ont offert l'occasion de travailler sur des objectifs communs applicables tant à l'école qu'à la maison, afin de soutenir les jeunes élèves de façon cohérente dans leur cheminement vers leur réussite personnelle.

La CSEM et le CRDITED de Montréal poursuivent donc leur partage d'idées, leurs travaux et leur collaboration continue afin de consolider ce partenariat et de développer un réseau de communication solide sur lequel les élèves, les parents, les professionnels, les éducateurs et les enseignants aux prises avec des situations à risque, puissent s'appuyer.

Manon Lusignan ps.éd., est conseillère au partenariat, CRDITED de Montréal. Tania Piperni M.Ed, est conseillère élèves TED, CSEM.



De gauche à droite : Tania Piperni, conseillère aux élèves TED à la CSEM, Julie René de Cotret, directrice adjointe Services aux élèves à la CSEM, Manon Lusignan, conseillère au partenariat au CRDITED de Montréal et Carla Safi, chef en réadaptation six ans et plus au CRDITED de Montréal.



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Thanks to Inspirations, our communities have the tools to support children and young adults with special needs.



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MP for Pierrefonds-Dollard
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Par Julie René de Cotret

Un toit pour la vie



« Maman, est-ce qu'un jour j'aurai la chance de vivre en appartement? »

C'est la question qui engendra une discussion entre deux mères, qui cherchaient une solution à long terme permettant à leurs jeunes adultes, vivant avec un handicap intellectuel, de vivre de manière harmonieuse leur passage vers l'indépendance. Cette discussion fut à l'origine d'un formidable projet appelé L'appart à moi.

C'est en Montérégie, que le projet L'appart à moi a débuté, par la réunion d'un groupe de parents de jeunes ayant une trisomie 21 ou une déficience intellectuelle. Ces parents ont décidé de mettre leurs efforts en commun afin d'offrir à leurs jeunes la possibilité de vivre cette transition vers l'autonomie. L'appart à moi est donc ce merveilleux projet visant la construction d'un bloc appartement

adapté aux besoins d'adultes ayant une déficience intellectuelle. Le projet, L'appart à moi, a pour mission de permettre aux jeunes adultes de poursuivre leur cheminement de vie dans un milieu sécuritaire, tout en assurant une intégration harmonieuse dans la société. Voici une belle façon de valoriser l'estime de soi de ces personnes.

L'appart à moi est conçu pour des adultes dans la vingtaine et trentaine qui sont présentement actifs, soit par une participation à des stages ou travaillant sur des plateaux de travail. Ces jeunes sont assez autonomes pour se déplacer en transport en commun régulier ou adapté. Ils présentent une capacité à interagir avec les autres futurs locataires et ne présentent pas de difficultés

de comportement. Ce projet leur donnera l'opportunité de vivre dans leur appartement tout en bénéficiant de l'accompagnement d'une personne compétente, qui saura les guider dans leur passage vers cette grande autonomie.

Actuellement, le groupe de parents travaille activement à déployer les démarches nécessaires afin que ce projet puisse voir le jour dans un avenir proche. Un tel projet ne peut se réaliser sans la collaboration active de différents partenaires municipaux, communautaires, financiers, ainsi que la participation des CSSS et du Centre de réadaptation de la Montérégie. L'appart à moi est un projet à but non-lucratif, qui saura encourager d'autres parents, vivant les mêmes situa-

tions, à faire de même.

J'ai eu la chance de côtoyer les parents ainsi que les jeunes qui bénéficieront de ce bloc appartement. La belle détermination qui se dégage de ce groupe est très inspirante. Tant les jeunes que les parents travaillent en collaboration afin de faire en sorte que le projet se réalise rapidement.

Si vous êtes un parent d'un jeune qui vivra prochainement cette transition, je vous invite à consulter le site de l'appart à moi au www.lappartamoi.ca.

Julie René de Cotret est la directrice-adjointe des services aux élèves, Commission scolaire English Montreal.

Choisir de Gagner

Par Marina La Chêne



Afin de sensibiliser les jeunes ayant une limitation fonctionnelle à l'importance de l'adoption de saines habitudes de vie, le Défi sportif AlterGo a mis en place le projet *Choisir de Gagner*, soutenu par Québec en Forme. Ce projet vise à promouvoir auprès des jeunes et de leurs familles, l'importance d'une bonne alimentation et de la pratique d'une activité physique régulièrement.

Pour cela, une tournée Choisir de Gagner est offerte aux écoles du Québec, aux centres de réadaptation et aux organismes qui proposent des activités aux jeunes de 5 à 21 ans ayant une limitation fonctionnelle. Offert gratuitement, cet événement présente des ateliers sur l'alimentation et l'activité physique ainsi que l'essai de différents sports adaptés.

Durant la semaine du Défi sportif AlterGo (du 28 avril au 4 mai 2014), des activités sont également proposées aux jeunes au travers du Parcours Choisir de Gagner. On y retrouve de l'initiation sportive, de l'initiation à la danse avec l'ambassadeur du

projet Luca « Lazylegz » Patuelli, mais aussi des ateliers ludiques et des outils dédiés aux parents, intervenants et organisations. Le projet Choisir de Gagner, c'est une belle opportunité de démontrer aux jeunes ayant une limitation fonctionnelle, que bien manger et être actif, c'est aussi pour eux!

Pour plus d'informations, consultez le site du Défi sportif AlterGo, www.defisportif.com.

Prêt de matériel, pour faciliter la pratique du sport adapté

Le Défi sportif AlterGo met des équipements sportifs à la disposition des organismes et écoles qui souhaitent organiser des activités d'initiation et de découverte de sports adaptés. Il est possible d'emprunter gratuitement le matériel dont vous avez besoin, et ce, pour la durée souhaitée!

Pour les demandes d'emprunt ou toutes autres questions, veuillez contacter Jérémie Brisebois, coordonnatrice à la programma-

tion sportive, par courriel à jeremie@defisportif.com ou par téléphone au 514 933-2739, poste 221.

Vignette D'accompagnement touristique et de loisir (VATL)

Tourist and Leisure Companion Sticker (TLCS)

Vous souhaitez profiter d'activités sportives et de loisir, mais vous avez un besoin d'accompagnement? VATL permet une entrée gratuite dans les établissements culturels et de loisir adhérents à l'accompagnateur d'une personne ayant une limitation fonctionnelle et nécessitant une aide lors de la visite des lieux touristiques et de loisir. Ce programme a ainsi pour objectif de faciliter l'accès au loisir et au tourisme aux personnes ayant une limitation fonctionnelle à travers le Québec.

Le programme de VATL est rendu possible grâce à l'Entente administrative sur la gestion du Fonds québécois d'initiatives socia-



(Courtoisie de Gilles Savoie)

les dans le cadre des Alliances pour la solidarité entre le ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité sociale du Québec et la Ville de Montréal.

Pour obtenir la VATL, il suffit d'en faire la demande en allant sur le site www.vatl.org. Il est également possible d'obtenir une version papier du formulaire en communiquant avec AlterGo par courriel à info@altergo.net ou par téléphone au 514 933-2739. La vignette est gratuite et valable à vie.

Marina Le Chêne est l'Agente de communication du Défi sportif AlterGo.



Le magazine Lunatic : un projet orientant pour des étudiants autistes

Par *Émilie Robert*

Vingt-deux. C'est le nombre d'étudiants ayant un trouble du spectre de l'autisme (TSA) qui fréquentent cette année le Collège Montmorency. En 2009, ils étaient deux. Cette fulgurante augmentation d'étudiants autistes n'est pas le propre de ce seul cégep. Dans les autres collèges et universités, nous observons le même phénomène. Leur façon d'être unique, leur profil d'habiletés inhabituel et leurs moyens de communiquer m'ont amenée à repenser la manière dont je faisais du counseling d'orientation avec eux. C'est ainsi qu'en 2013, une collègue orthopédagogue et moi avons mis sur pied un projet innovateur s'adressant à ces étudiants.

C'est à la suite de mes consultations en orientation avec cinq étudiants TSA que j'ai remarqué qu'ils partageaient trois choses : un besoin de socialiser malgré d'importantes difficultés à y arriver ; un intérêt et un talent pour l'écriture, ainsi qu'une préoccupation pour leur avenir professionnel. Nous leur avons proposé de les réunir autour d'un projet de rédaction d'un magazine. Par cette activité, nous souhaitons qu'ils puissent se faire des amis, se familiariser avec les exigences du monde du travail et de pouvoir confirmer ou infirmer leur intérêt pour le domaine de l'édition. De prime abord, ils étaient intéressés, mais aussi anxieux, face à cette nouvelle expérience. Toutefois, dès la première rencontre, chacun s'est senti à sa place. Enfin, ils étaient en présence de cinq personnes qui parlent le même langage qu'eux, partagent les mêmes passions et aiment s'attarder à tous les moindres détails...

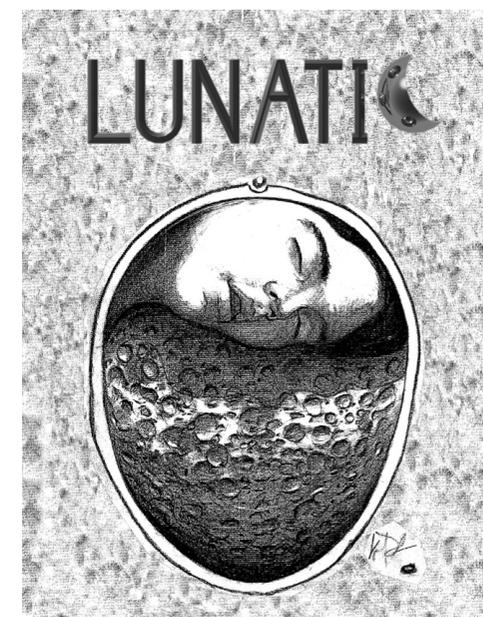


L'équipe Lunatic : Anthony Lemieux, Marianne El-Sabbagh, Nicolas Lavoie-Zhao, Jeremy Roberts. En bas à gauche (Marian Fortier, conseillère à la vie étudiante), Élise Robert-Huet, Alexandre Dalpé, Marilène Blanchette, Sarah Djimani, (Émilie Robert, conseillère d'orientation), (Chantal Courtemanche, orthopédagogue.) (crédit photo, Annie Poirier)

Ainsi, à chaque semaine de l'automne 2013, les étudiants se réunissaient. Guidés par ma collègue et moi-même, ils choisissaient de façon consensuelle le thème du numéro en cours, leur sujet d'article, l'illustration de la page couverture et la mise en page. Notre plus grand étonnement fut de constater la qualité de leur travail d'équipe. Ils étaient très adéquats dans la rétroaction qu'ils don-

naient sur les textes des autres et dans la manière dont ils recevaient cette rétroaction au sujet de leur article. Ils sont si talentueux en écriture que les textes furent prêts bien plus rapidement que nous nous y attendions !

C'est ainsi que le 26 novembre 2013, la toute première édition du magazine Lunatic a été



publiée. Le magazine, d'une dizaine de pages, a touché le public et les médias non seulement par sa qualité, mais en raison du dépassement de soi dont ces jeunes ont fait preuve. Et les étudiants en retirent plusieurs bénéfices. Tout d'abord, ils ont accru leur confiance en eux. Ils se sont fait plusieurs amis et semblent plus à l'aise en situation de groupe. Ils ont aussi développé des habiletés à s'exprimer en public. D'autre part, plusieurs ont pu confirmer leur choix professionnel ou avoir une meilleure compréhension des métiers de la culture et des médias. Un bel avenir est promis au magazine Lunatic et une édition du magazine paraîtra à la fin de chaque session d'étude.

Enfin, ce type d'activité fait maintenant partie de mes outils d'orientation scolaire et professionnelle avec les étudiants autistes. C'est à la fois orientant, mais surtout, une source précieuse d'épanouissement pour ces étudiants aux forces et talents insoupçonnés.

Émilie Robert est conseillère d'orientation au Collège Montmorency. Elle travaille exclusivement avec des étudiants en situation de handicap et plus spécifiquement avec ceux ayant un trouble du spectre de l'autisme. Elle est l'auteure du blogue « L'orientation avec la clientèle émergente – acochandicap.blogspot.com »



Suzie Epelbaum-Lazar

It is with great pleasure that we welcome Suzie Epelbaum-Lazar to the Inspirations team in the capacity of Advertising and Sponsorship Specialist. Suzie comes to us with a wealth of experience as a Marketing Manager and Senior Research Associate at EDC Export Development Canada, where she was employed for nine years. She is a mom to two beautiful little girls, and an avid yogi. If you have already met Suzie, we're sure you'll agree that she brings contagious energy to the team.



Positive behaviour support at Saint Vincent Elementary School in Laval

By Grace Courey

Approximately 10 years ago, the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board adopted a board-wide philosophy of using Positive Behaviour Support (PBS) in our schools. I was so inspired by this philosophy that I proceeded to implement it immediately. I have continued to be an avid proponent of this philosophy, and in fact, I evolve with it on a yearly basis.

Positive Behavioural Support (PBS) is a philosophy that provides a systematic approach to support academic and behavioural achievements for all students. Research indicates that schools implementing system-wide evidence based interventions report improved academic performance and reductions in office discipline referrals, for students with and without special needs. My experience with PBS has lived up to my high expectations.

Each PBS plan is inherent to the school culture. It provides for a shared understanding between teachers and students about fair, reasonable, safe and expected behaviours. In our school we chose the anchor values of Respect, Responsibility and Safety. Those principles promote the integration of the competencies needed in effective communication, problem solving, and conflict resolution. My use of PBS as a strategy to maintain appropriate social behaviour has made my school safer. "Safer schools are also more effective learning environments" (Resource - Positive Behavioural Supports: Information for Educators www.nasponline.org). At Saint-Vincent, our adage is: "Daily encouragement is the key to success!"

Following the PBS philosophy involves the use of universal programs provided to

all students at all levels to teach both academic and behavioural curricula. Additional levels of programming (Secondary, Tertiary), are added as necessary to support both academic and behavioural needs. In addition, use of incentive programs reinforces positive behaviour while use of formative (educational) consequences help correct mistakes.

We have been using the program "Kelso's Choices" as the Universal program to teach students social skills and conflict resolution, and have monthly assemblies focusing on positive character traits. Students seen practicing these character traits are presented with merit certificates at assemblies to celebrate their successes. Students take a bow while the audience celebrates them with cheers – and ensures that their efforts have been noticed. Random acts of kindness and citizenship are also acknowledged with regular draws for rewards, as well as respect for the environment and caretaker, with a "golden broom" award for the cleanest Saint Vincent class. In addition, students are invited to attend "Kelso's Kafe", where they are treated to home baked healthy treats, music and fun, hosted by the school principal and other staff members. As in the true nature of inclusion, all students are included in this process. I have recently met former students now in high school who still talk about the effects that these special events have had on them!

The PBS philosophy supports student success in a way that students feel empowered, eager and proud to be at their best. PBS has made a great difference in the schools I have been involved in, showing a marked improvement in many areas – most importantly, in the general wellbeing of all students!

Grace Courey, BEd, MA Leadership, is the Principal of Saint Vincent Elementary School, SWLSB.



Saint Vincent students at Kelso's Kafe. (Photo credit, Julia Pavan)



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About REISA and the EAST Foundation/ Centre for Dreams and Hopes

By Claudia Maiolo

The East Island Network for English Language Services (REISA) is a community organization that works to increase access to health and social services in English for residents of Montreal's east-end, through collaboration with public, private and community stakeholders.

REISA is one of 20 networks across the province of Québec operating the Networking Partnership Initiative, a program managed by the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) under the Official Languages Minority Communities Program. The program aims to support English-speaking minority communities in improving and maintaining access to health and social services. Furthermore, the program supports the capacity of these communities to ensure their vitality through cooperation and partnership with the health and

social services public institutions.

Established in 2005, REISA has supported community development in various fields including addiction, drug awareness and prevention, family counselling and mediation, the creation of student training sites in the community, community education on mental health, prevention and management of diabetes, supported and empowered seniors in leading activity groups in their community.

REISA's partners include local public healthcare and educational institutions, the local school board and community organizations. To learn more about the network and its activities, visit their website at www.reisa.ca.



Clients standing in front of the Centre for Dreams and Hopes, located at 12550 boulevard Lacordaire in Montreal North. (Photo courtesy of the Centre for Dreams and Hopes).

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EAST Foundation/Centre for Dreams and Hopes

One of REISA's founding members and current board member is the EAST Foundation, a non-profit organization established in 1999. The Foundation strives to subsidize and support the development of English therapeutic and recreational activities for youth and young adults with intellectual and/or physical disabilities, including autism spectrum disorder in the East End of Montreal. Furthermore, the EAST Foundation works to encourage the integration of children with special needs into mainstream educational, social and leisure activities, and to provide instrumental and emotional support to parents and caregivers of children with intellectual and/or physical disabilities.

In 2006, a separate non-profit organization was formed called the Center for Dreams & Hopes (CDH). Its mission is to provide therapeutic and recreational activities to children and young adults with physical and intellectual disabilities. The CDH offers

a range of programs and services for their clientele including speech and occupational therapy, an early intervention program, social skills training, two summer camp (one integrated and another for adults), and leisure activities such as social outings for young adolescents.

The CDH currently serves 180 children and 45 adults. Children who have participated in such programs have shown notable improvement in different areas of their development, including their ability to interact with others, their language and motor skills.

The EAST Foundation encourages the community to raise funds for their cause. It is incredible to see what can be achieved with compassion, strength and human love.

For information visit www.eastfoundation.ca or call 514-323-9950.

Claudia Maiolo is the Communications and Projects Agent at REISA - East Island Network for English Language Services.



Montreal family visits Curacao Dolphin Therapy & Research Center

By Wendy Singer

In November 2013, Erika Tencer took her family on a trip of a lifetime to Curacao Dolphin Therapy & Research Centre (CDTC) on the Dutch Caribbean island of Curacao. Tencer's 17-year-old daughter Atara Stolvitsky has Down's Syndrome, and the family was eager to see what doors dolphin assisted therapy might open for her.

The CDTC offers a two-week program that integrates in one part interaction between therapist, dolphin and child and in the other psychological, occupational, physical and speech therapy. It claims to improve emotional control, communication skills and attention span, while enabling children to be more receptive to other forms of therapy. Any "step forward" or breakthroughs must be reinforced at home in complement with

already existing therapies in order to continue the progress.

Tencer and her husband Jon Silver set out on a six-month fundraising blitz to raise funds for their travel and hotel, while Dolphin Aid Canada provided funds for the CDTC therapy. Their efforts turned into a well-oiled machine, pumping one event out after another, including a movie screening of Dolphin Boy at Summit School.

Ambassador to Dolphin Aid Canada Sheila Botton has facilitated financing and travel for three Canadian families in their journey to CDTC, and has seen benefits for each child and their family. "The work between the therapist, dolphin and child builds trust. Once trust is built, they go a step further. Confidence builds and the child progresses beyond expectations," says Botton.

Atara adored her time in the water with a bottle-nosed dolphin named Bonnie. Her main form of communication is American Sign Language (ASL), which her therapists saw as a crutch to verbal communication. They therefore focused her therapy on speech.

"I cannot put to words the growth that happened every day," shared Tencer. "The speech and behavior skills that she worked on with Paul (psychologist) and Neeltje (speech therapist/assistant) will continue to improve only if we continue to work on them. Dolphin assisted therapy is no miracle cure."

The family, including Atara's younger sister Tova, had the opportunity to explore Curacao in their down time, enjoying respite at Dolphin Suites, which is a fully accessible hotel within walking distance of CDTC

(www.dolphinsuitescuracao.com).

Four months later, the family continues to see improvements. "I thought that Atara cut off thoughts of Bonnie when we left Curacao," says Tencer. "I was wrong. Lately she's been talking about her. Sometimes she draws pictures of 'Boie-the big fish', and sometimes it sounds like she recalls Bonnie in her dreams. It's really nice to know that this life changing event continues its impact."

"It was a voyage, a voyage in discovery for us, and for Atara," adds Silver.

For information about Dolphin Aid Canada, visit <http://www.dolphintherapycanada.com>

For information about Curacao Dolphin Therapy & Research Center visit <http://www.curacaodolphintherapy.com>.

Moving forward at Giant Steps School

By Nick Primiano, Marla Cable, and Kim Hewel

With a new administration in place, many positive changes have been made at Giant Steps School (GS) as they pursue their mandate to improve the lives of students with autism.

"It has been an amazing school year," shares Nick Primiano, Director of Giant Step School. "Our student population has increased to 71. We have five English classes and two French classes. Our multi-disciplinary approach (teachers, special education technicians, attendants, speech therapists, occupational therapists, behaviour, social and life skills specialists, music therapist and computer specialist) has helped all of our children improve their socialization, speech and academic results."

For over 25 years, Giant Steps School has been a pioneer in the successful integration of ASD students in their neighborhood schools. Their inclusion program acknowledges the right of each child to participate to the best of his or her ability in the school system in order to reach his or her full social, emotional, cognitive and communicative potential.

GS inclusion coordinators' student-oriented

workshops are becoming pre-requisites for including students in classrooms. They focus on accepting ourselves, recognizing strengths, weaknesses and talents, and being aware of differences. Coordinators support and guide educators in the school setting, monitoring progress with regular classroom visits and ongoing communication.

"Our students have the opportunity to learn from and model the behaviours of their neurotypical peers," says Kim Hewel, Inclusion Coordinator at Giant Steps. "They have access to the full range of learning experiences offered to students in regular classrooms. By welcoming our students and educators, the inclusion school community is sensitized to the needs and differences of those with autism."

The Giant Steps Resource and Training Centre, coordinated by Marla Cable, is open to the public by appointment. It offers a wide range of resources and support for a variety of autism related issues, including a reference library, consultation services, conferences and workshops, outreach, and fieldwork placements.

They offer courses and workshops to schools, daycares and groups, and offer a workshop series for parents and educators which consists of eight different presentations over an eight week period.

Other new developments include string and voice music, visual arts programs, and morning and afternoon daycare organized by Camp Caravane, Christmas holiday and March break camp (this camp continues to be available during the summer). To further assist the parents, a respite program will be available on weekends.

"We are also offering three organized classes for autistic adults that include 'Socialization, Life Skills and Art'," says Primiano. "We are very excited and motivated with all the activities and projects at Giant Steps."

For information visit www.giant-steps-montreal.com, <https://www.facebook.com/giant-stepsmontreal> or call 514-935-1911.



Catherine and Simon at Giant Steps School. (Photo credit, Ross White)

ADULT COURSES

Giant Steps School is offering a variety of night courses to adults on the autism spectrum and for the general population starting the week of April 14th to June 20th 2 hrs/week.

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Mega Bloks celebrates Autism Awareness Month: Building blocks for kids and bridges with community

What could be more exciting than visiting the largest toy factory in North America? And what if that toy factory happened to be right in your backyard? Mega Bloks construction toys have been favourites of children and parents around the world for over 25 years. And they now offer factory tours to school kids every Friday morning. Kids embark on a train that takes them through each step of the toy making process, from packaging, to plastic receiving, colouring and shaping. It is a fascinating experience for kids (and adults!) as they witness first-hand how their favourite toys are made.

During the month of April, Mega Bloks tours were reserved for children with autism in honour of Autism Awareness Month. Kids came from Autism Speaks Canada, Giant Steps School, and the Welcoming Classes at the English Montreal School Board. And they had a blast, especially reveling in time playing with blocks in the colourful, enchanting Mega show room, and peeking into the well-stocked bag of Mega-gifts they took home with

them.

Mega Bloks has always been passionate about children and their well being, and this is reflected in every block they make. "We are proud to be the presenting sponsor for the Walk Now for Autism Speaks Canada event, for the fourth consecutive year," said Bisma Ansari, Vice President of Marketing at MEGA Brands. "The Mega Team looks forward to the walk every year, it gives us the chance to spend time with those touched by autism spectrum disorders and to give back to the Montreal community."

Sometimes kids with autism have to work harder – and differently – so finding successful techniques that can aid parents and caregivers is invaluable. Mega Bloks First Builders building blocks are a powerful tool that can provide the double benefit of stimulating play while providing multiple developmental benefits. They are easy to hold, stack and dismantle, with oversized prongs that hold them together, and can improve collaboration, pretending, verbal communication, and core learning skills such as ini-

tiative, fine motor skills, focus and attention and organization. Kids also love the repetitive nature of play the blocks offer.

"Children's brains are always learning valuable skills and blocks are a wonderful example of the type of toy that can be both skill-building and fun," says Developmental psychologist and child play expert Dr. Maureen O'Brien. "Themes and patterns, like friendly creatures and colourful vehicles, provide children with the value of basic construction play, plus the power of imagination."

That's where Mega Bloks First Builders series 'Learn my Vehicles' and 'Learn my Animals' lines come in! Work together with your child as they learn about different vehicles like fire trucks and school buses, or matching mommy animals with their babies with whimsical stickers that stimulate mem-



Student enjoying the Mega show room during the Mega Bloks factory tour.

ory and physical skills.

Most importantly, kids love the blocks and have fun with them. And why not? They are a perfect fit for little hands with big imaginations!

To learn more about Mega Bloks visit parents.megabloks.com.

Luca "Lazylegz" dances his way to the Ellen show

By Bram D. Eisenthal

Many people complain about going to work. But for Luca "Lazylegz" Patuelli, it's a pleasure. Why would it not be? Luca, who at 29 has been leg-challenged all his life, just can't stop dancing. So going to his downtown office from home is nothing overly-challenging,

even without fully-functioning legs.

"I love being at my office," Luca admitted. "I can help sell our merchandise, I can keep my eye on things and I can stay in the middle of the action."

The Bethesda, Maryland-born Luca came into this world with a birth defect called Arthrogyrosis, which affects the skeletal and muscular structure and abilities of the lower limbs. He will readily show you how skinny his legs are, as if matchsticks had been implanted from the thighs down. Without legs as we know them, he was aided by "amazing parents" and brother Stephano, now 34, as well as a plethora of good friends, to function properly in society. But the rest he attributes to pure passion and love of life. "I like to point out that while my legs may be lazy, my mind is hyperactive," he said with a chuckle.

As mentioned, Luca is an avid dancer, unbelievable, perhaps, but a testament to the power of positive thinking. "Yes, I dance all the time and that is a tribute of sorts to the

'No Excuses, No Limits' philosophy I believe in heart and soul," he stated. "I speak to young students at schools year-round and it gives me extreme pleasure to greet them when they run up to the stage afterwards and, after they ask me for an autograph, tell me about their own life challenges."

One of his personal life challenges was accomplished more recently, as Luca walked a full kilometer without mechanical assistance, falling regularly but making it in just 55 minutes.

Luca also receives many letters and e-mails from parents, letting him know what an impact he has made not only on their children, but also on them. One parent told me that they walked without a walker for the first time in many years, willing themselves to do that. No Excuses, No Limits means there are no such things as obstacles.

When younger, Luca played many different sports, but because of his busy speaking schedule and his dancing, he no longer has time for that. He will shortly depart for a month-long speaking tour throughout the

U.K., but will then be back visiting local schools until the end of the academic year. He is also very active – the official ambassador, in fact – in a group called Projet RAD (Reservé Aux Danseurs), which was a key component of this year's Defi Sportif. Projet RAD offers dance classes to children with special needs, recently working with a group at the Mackay Centre School.

Lazylegz, it seems, is quite the passionate sort, with a definite leg up on the average human. Married for several months now to Melissa, an occupational therapist, Lazylegz recently achieved TV stardom when he was a guest on The Ellen Show. Ellen surprised him with a \$10,000 cheque to enable him and his wife to go on a honeymoon.

Here is Luca's appearance on The Ellen Show via YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YpPk8yBbCPU>

For information about Projet R.A.D. (Reservé aux Danseurs), visit www.projetrad.com.



Luca and Melissa with Ellen.
(Photo courtesy of Luca Patuelli)



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Erica Gambino conquers challenges with good humour, optimism and a smile

By Brittany Witt

Andy Gambino and Anna Tartaglia enrolled their daughter Erica at Lester B. Pearson High School (LBPHS) in Montreal North, and with the help of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), all agreed it would be a positive move and give her an opportunity to shine.

While studying to receive her diploma at LBPHS, 19-year-old Erica's favourite subject was English because she loves to read. She graduated with friends who care and respect her and teachers who think she is remarkable.

Erica has Down's Syndrome and while some might view the condition as an obstacle, her parents knew otherwise. "As parents you know your child better than anybody," said Gambino. "We saw how capable she was and the growth in her ability to learn. We didn't want to deprive her of any opportunity."

"It is very rare that coded students graduate from a regular high school," explained Tartaglia.

"She attended many sessions with psycholo-

gists who stated it couldn't be done and that she would not graduate."

This giant step forward was not without concerns. The Gambinos worried about large class size and how Erica would be accepted. Erica laughs and said the first year of LPBHS was a big adjustment; the workload and certain subjects challenged her. She also added that she didn't think she was any different; the first year of high school would be hard for any student to handle.

The Gambinos concerns were quickly put to rest. Erica, with her bubbly personality and warm heart, naturally attached to people. She became close to many teachers and students and everyone was extremely kind and treated her with respect.

"When school started, Erica had a slight fear to go without adult supervision," stated Tartaglia. "Throughout her time at LBPHS she learnt to be more self-sufficient and independent and felt comfortable with herself."

"When Erica sets her mind to something she can really focus," explained Mr. Gambino. "She overcomes challenges and really per-

severes."

When they learned last April that Erica would graduate, they couldn't have been more proud.

"You should have seen the smile on her face!" beamed Mr. Gambino. "When Erica walked onto the stage, all the teachers and students applauded. They recognized the effort and challenges that Erica faced over the past five years."

LBPHS Child Care Workers Terry Paci and Andrea DeVico agreed that Erica's success is thanks to all of her hard work and will-power. "Watching Erica receive her high school diploma was truly one of the highlights of our careers." they added.

Liliane Yiptong, Special Education Consultant at the EMSB shares: "Erica has blossomed into an assertive young lady who has taught us a lesson in perseverance and assiduity. She is a ray of sunshine that brings out the best in all who have the chance to be in her presence. Erica has also been blessed with supportive parents who have enabled her to believe in her potential."



Erica Gambino graduating from Lester B. Pearson High School.

Erica is now volunteering at Michelangelo International Elementary School in RDP and is considering a career in the culinary arts.

ASD Hospital Program working with the community

By Tania Piperni M.Ed

Parents, educators and professionals, including those at the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Program at the Montreal Children's Hospital, know how difficult it is to receive services in Montreal for a child with a diagnosis of ASD. According to Dr. Mayada Elsabbagh, assistant professor in psychiatry at McGill University, who works directly with the ASD Clinic at MCH, there is now an initiative to expand the partnerships within the Montreal community. Their approach is motivated by key findings from their national research addressing the practice and policies around ASD in Quebec. They are looking into the state of care for some 300 families that are on the MCH's wait list for diagnosis, making it an over two year wait. As Dr Elsabbagh points out, this opposes the evidence reflecting the importance of early intervention for children with an ASD.

The ASD team is taking a proactive role in finding community-based solutions that will support families that are served by their center and participate in their research. The clinic is mandated to provide advanced, evidence-based care for all families they see, however, budget cuts, restricted mandates, limited training initiatives, and a narrowed focus have caused stagnation. As Dr. Elsabbagh points out, "Many clinicians are just as frustrated as families."

Thus the MCH has created research projects that are aligned with the needs of families enabling the ASD team to make modifications. Pathways to Better Outcomes is a national study which has followed the development of children who were diagnosed at the MCH over eight years ago. The ASD team is interested in community partnerships that will allow new families to get timely diagnostic services, and to expand access to care within the community. According to Dr. Elsabbagh, the study suggests that nearly half of the families who were awaiting diagnosis had no access to services

such as social workers, CSSS support, and essential services during this waiting period; "focused partnerships among different services will help families get the tailored services they need."

The MCH has also organized a series of events during the month of May. A keynote presentation geared towards doctors will explain advances in intervention and further their education and exposure to ASD. A workshop for community practitioners who serve children with ASD from ages 0 to five will focus on early intervention. Principles and application of supportive interventions for parents trying to access services in the public sector will also be discussed. The goal is to help parents navigate through the medical system, and equip professionals with concrete tools and strategies in order to achieve this.

There will also be a "Café Scientifique" - a public forum to discuss major findings that will explain policies and provide concrete

evidence of how Quebec's vision for autism is not currently being met.

Dr. Elsabbagh anticipates that follow up steps will be taken, and funds will be raised to help projects continue within the community. Hopefully this will develop into long-term substantial projects that capture the stories families tell and to allow families access to what they are entitled.

The Café Scientifique will take place on May 21, 2014 from 6:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. Are we delivering family-centred care for autism in Quebec? Lessons from the National Pathways Study in the Forbes-Cushing Amphitheatre (D-182), Montreal Children's Hospital. See our facebook page for details at www.facebook.com/inspirationsnews.

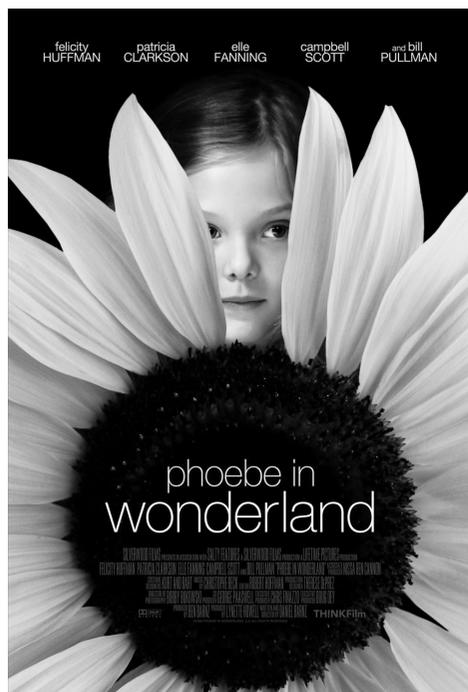
Tania Piperni is the Autism Spectrum Disorders Consultant at the English Montreal School Board.



Arts & entertainment

DVD Reviews by Andrea Di Tomaso

PHOEBE IN WONDERLAND (2008)



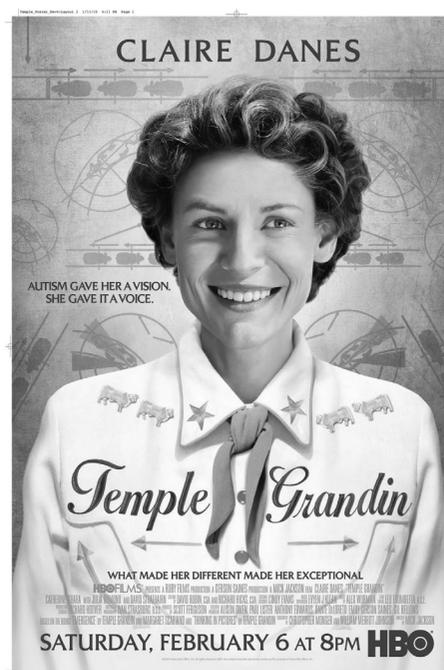
Phoebe in Wonderland is an imaginative story of Phoebe, (Elle Fanning) an intelligent, precocious, and imaginative nine-year-old girl. Phoebe's wild and unique personality clashes with the rule-obsessed world she's living in. Her odd, ritualistic, behaviours cause her to be bullied by classmates and misunderstood by judgmental teachers.

When Phoebe signs up to audition for the school play, *Alice in Wonderland*, she lands the lead role and soon grows attached to the brilliant but unorthodox drama teacher Ms. Dodger. However, Phoebe continues to withdraw into her own fantasy world and her odd, mysterious and sometimes inappropriate behaviour jeopardizes her chances to remain in the play.

Written and directed by Daniel Barnz, all these issues and more are smartly interwoven with the characters from the classic Lewis Carroll novel. Although this film can be very dark at times, there's a whimsical aspect that keeps things from getting too overdramatic. *Phoebe In Wonderland* is a great story with excellent performances.

Genre: Drama (PG 13)
Watch it on: Netflix
Download it on: iTunes

TEMPLE GRANDIN (2010)



If you enjoyed reading the feature article on Doctor Grandin's visit to Montreal on Page 4 of this edition of *Inspirations*, you should watch this fantastic biopic on her life. Originally aired on HBO, *Temple Grandin* won over 27 awards, including a Golden Globe for Best Actress, making this a must see movie.

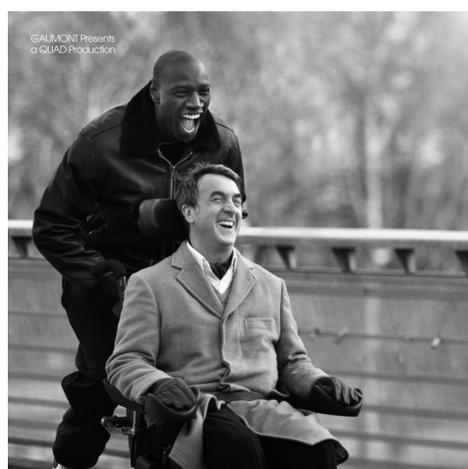
Diagnosed with autism, Temple Grandin's (Claire Danes) mother Eustacia (Julia Ormond), works hard to get her into a regular school, and when she finally begins to speak, realizes her mission to have people treat Temple as "different, not less".

In the summer of 1966, Temple went to live at her Aunt Ann's (Catherine O'Hara) ranch near Tucson Arizona. Temple is immediately drawn to the cows and horses and she discovers she has an unusual capacity to empathize with them, changing the direction of her life forever.

Director Mick Jackson uses a variety of creative graphic, sound and film editing to give the viewer a sense of what it feels like to be autistic.

Genre: Biography / Drama (PG)
Rent it: Video-on-Demand
Download it on: iTunes

THE INTOUCHABLES (2011)



François Cluzet Omar Sy
Untouchable

Written and directed by Eric TOLEDANO and Olivier NAKACHE

ANNE LE NY ANDRÉ FELICETTI CLAUDE MILLET DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY MATHEU VANDEPPE PRODUCED BY LOUVOIS ERARDI
EDITED BY DOMINIQUE HENRI ANGELOUS COSTUME DESIGNER BEATRICE BRET EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS FRANCIS GABANANELLI
EXECUTIVE PRODUCERS AND PRODUCERS LAURENT SIVELY PRODUCED BY NICOLAS BOVINE ANDRÉS SORIANO YANN FENOUX LAURENT JETTOUN
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DISTRIBUTED BY QUAD GANIMONT FILM FILMS CANADIAN PRODUCTION WITH THE PARTICIPATION OF QUAD - AND GANIMONT

A millionaire widower, Philippe (François Cluzet) lives with his teenage daughter Elisa (Alba Gaïa Kraghede Bellugi) in a luxurious Paris apartment. Hiring a new caregiver to assist him with his day-to-day life, he rejects highly qualified candidates in favor of Driss (Omar Sy), who only applied for the position to ensure he keeps getting his welfare payments.

Driss, a recently released ex-convict, exudes a brash confidence and brutal straightforwardness that impresses Philippe, who had become tired of the pity that he received from his previous helpers. Driss faces an enormous culture clash and many challenges as he adapts to Philippe's opulent life in Paris. Both Driss and Philippe learn life lessons and introduce each other to exciting, hilarious and even touching experiences.

The *Intouchables* is written and directed by Eric Toledano and Olivier Nakacheo and is based on a true story. This character-driven dramedy gives us a peek into the informal, spontaneous and playful, side of caregiving. It also opens our eyes to the loneliness and isolation of quadriplegic and other individuals with similar disabilities.

Genre: Dramatic Comedy (R)
Rent it: Video-on-Demand
Download it: iTunes

Deaf Snow White

By Wendy Singer

Seeing Voices Montreal is making theatre accessible to people that are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing, and raising awareness.

To read a review of *Deaf Snow White* visit our blog at <http://inspirationsnews-mtl.blogspot.ca/2014/03/deaf-snow-white-hands-that-talk-have.html>.



Deaf Snow White, played by Lisa Mazza, and Prince P-X, played by Pierre-Olivier Beaulac-Bouchard.

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Sports by Daniel Smajovits



Paralympic success for Canada



Overcoming ADD: Montreal Alouettes' Eric Deslauriers

With a total of 16 medals: seven gold, two silver and seven bronze, Canada once again has reason to celebrate after a successful Paralympic Games in Sochi, Russia.

Leading the way for Canada was visually impaired cross-country skier Brian McKeever, who won three gold medals, making him the first Canadian Winter Paralympian to have won 10 gold medals during his career.

With a total of 54 athletes participating, Canada met its goal by finishing third in the medal count, narrowly missing their record set at the Vancouver Paralympic Games, when Canada captured 19 medals, including 10 gold.

Thanks to the growth of technology the Games received unprecedented exposure. For those with access to a computer or to the CBC application on any mobile device, they were able to enjoy more than 250 hours of coverage, in addition to the 90 hours on regular television.

As a fan of all sports, I welcomed with open arms the growth in CBC's coverage as it allowed me to see our athletes participate in a variety of disciplines. Unfortunately, while these athletes compete in World Championships like their able-bodied peers, those events do not receive any coverage or attention.



Canadian Mac Marcoux and his guide Robin Femy compete in the men's slalom visually impaired event at the Sochi 2014 Paralympic Winter Games in Sochi, Russia. (Photo Scott Grant/ Canadian Paralympic Committee)

Personally, I take particular interest in the sport of visually impaired skiing due to the incredible courage it takes to participate. As someone who has difficulty lacing up skates and an even tougher time when actually on the ice, I am amazed by the bravery and trust exhibited by these athletes in themselves.

These athletes do not compete for the medals on a bunny hill – but race down the slopes at speeds up to 120 kilometers per hour, trusting in their guide, skiing 20 feet ahead of them. While it takes years to develop this partnership and trust, these athletes defy the odds on every run and are a shining example of defiance and how individuals can overcome any disability.

Having worked in the National Football League and the Canadian Football League, I have seen first-hand the intensity needed for professional athletes to prepare for both the season and individual games.

In addition to the physical conditioning, the week leading up to a game is comprised of multiple meetings and sessions in which patience and attention is vital. In a sport where attention to detail is critical, not paying attention in any of these sessions could mean the difference between victory and defeat.

For Montreal Alouettes slot-back Eric Deslauriers, his battle with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) could have easily derailed him from realizing his dream of playing professional sports.

Speaking with students at Lester B. Pearson High School in Montreal North, Deslauriers addressed his battle with ADD, a disorder that continues to be very common today.

"It was a little bit harder for me to comprehend and to understand right away," he said. "I'm more hyperactive and I tend to move around and be easily distracted. When I was younger, I was distracting to the teacher or my fellow students."

However, through sports, Deslauriers found a way to harness his ADD and turn it into a positive force.

"I had to learn to control my ADD and to be honest, football, hockey and sports in general helped me by getting some of the emotion and excitement out."

After graduating in Communications from Eastern Michigan University, Deslauriers was drafted by the Montreal Alouettes in 2006. He has since captured two Grey Cup Championships and amassed more than 1,000 receiving yards and three touchdowns in his seven-year career.

"I see, more at my age, that I can control it and take hold of it. [My ADD] is not something that controls me, I control it," he added. "No one is ever mad at someone for being too extravagant and too nice. There are always ways I can use it to my advantage. In that, it also helped me define goals. It helped me find football and hockey, which gave me goals to continue my education and go to university and overcome a lot of that adversity."

Please follow this link for a short interview with Eric from Lester B. Pearson High School: <https://vimeo.com/86992351>.

Lakeshore Super Sonics Soccer without limitations

As far as we're concerned, there are no limits when it comes to learning basic soccer skills, getting fit and having fun while discovering a healthy appetite for competition, whether it be during a game of soccer or our fun filled mini skill challenges; which help strengthen the children's cognitive and gross motor skills. Our ambitions are to fine tune each individual child's abilities and develop them further so that they may discover their inner athlete and live life to the fullest.

Our teams are built on a foundation made of basic soccer skills and a strong sense of pride. Our program is open to all children aged 5 to 15 years who are intellectually challenged, or who suffer from poor social skills or low self-esteem due to behavioral or learning difficulties.

In conjunction with our commitment to player development, we've also developed a **Young Coach Mentoring Program**; for aspiring young coaches aged between 14 and 20 years. We find that an extraordinary relationship between these young coaches and their players quickly develops, which radiates confidence, mutual respect and an equal footing. Coaches and players alike learn valuable life skills sharing an appreciation for the great effort needed to overcome any challenges life has to throw at them.

Getting involved with **Super Sonics** is when the magic begins!

Kelly-Anne Soutter – Club Manager

www.lakeshoresoccer.ca or info@lakeshoresoccer.ca





Mackay Centre School students pose for Camera Roll Productions as they film the Inspirations video.

Liam O'Rourke and **Dan Ten-veen** believe in encouraging and supporting the social and creative advancement of youth with autism. Through their community-based organization **Camera Roll Productions**, they teach and nurture students on making video productions and how to work with technology to explore their creative potential, both year-round in their studio and at their summer camp. When Cinémas Guzzo offered Inspirations screen time to air a promotional video, we contacted Liam and Dan. Our video sponsor, **The Singer Wishing Well**, saw the merit in working with filmmakers who were doing tremendous work with people living with an ASD. The final product is fantastic, and all the more so by knowing that many of their students collaborated on the video. For information about Camera Roll Productions visit www.camerearollproductions.com. To see our video, visit our website at www.inspirationsnews.com, or <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j9QT8qgApxA>.



Inspirations Notebook

Wendy Singer



'Come Together' - the winning t-shirt design by The Big Blue Hug. (Courtesy of Jason Goldsmith)

Montreal's own artist and autism advocate **Jason Goldsmith** of **The Big Blue Hug** was commissioned to design **Autism Speak Canada's** official walk t-shirt, which will be given to participants at all walks across the country. Goldsmith created three beautiful designs based on his inspirational paintings 'RISE', 'Together' and 'Come Together'. And participants across the country got to vote for their favourite! The design with the most votes was 'Come Together' and will be put on the t-shirt. Visit Autism Speak Canada's new website to register for this year's walk at www.walknowforautismspeaks.ca.



Students and teachers enjoying Light a Dream's Casino & Auction Night.

Light A Dream's mission is to enable young adults with special needs to experience and learn in a productive business environment. Always abiding by their mission "Seeing the Abilities in Disabilities," their hard work in their candle workshop and store in the West Island provides the community with quality products and services. At the Light a Dream 10th Casino & Auction Night at the Beaconsfield Golf Club, guests tried their luck at the blackjack and roulette tables, and bid generously on a slew of silent auction items. Highlights of the evening included an award presentation, live entertainment with **Jed Bermillo**, and a live auction. Every dollar raised goes directly towards supporting Light a Dream, a non-profit charitable organization.



The Centre for the Arts in Human Development benefit concert, with Stephen Goulet and Cantor Adam Stotland.

The Shaare Zion Sisterhood presented a benefit concert in support of **The Centre for the Arts in Human Development (CAHD)** of **Concordia University** at the Shaare Zion Synagogue. Spearheaded by **Eleanor Diamond**, the event featured CAHD participants who entertained a full house with their music and dance. Special guest **Cantor Adam Stotland** joined in on several musical numbers, including Angeline the Baker with **Stephen Goulet**, and Hava Nagila with **Robbie Zunenshine** and his group. CAHD uses art, drama, music and dance/movement therapies to promote autonomy, improve self-confidence and social skills, and enhance the overall quality of life of people with developmental disabilities and other special needs. Congratulations to **Lenore Vosberg**, CAHD's Director of Clinical Services and Public Outreach, who recently received a 2013 Miriam Foundation Hero Award (see next piece in this column).



The Summit School T.E.C.C. students flash their movie passes, courtesy of Cinémas Guzzo, after helping distribute Inspirations.

Special Needs Consultant **Abby Kleinberg-Bassel** celebrated the expansion of the services provided by her office with a lively wine and cheese open house. This marks the inauguration of the first RDI Clinic (Relationship Development Intervention™) in Montreal, welcoming Certified RDI® Consultants **Camelia Varga** and **Francesca Dansereau**. The event also introduced the Montreal Special Needs Foundation, spearheaded by **Maddie Pettigrosso** and her dynamic team. The mission of this foundation, which is aligned with the Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation, is to ensure that every child with special needs and their family receive the resources and financial support they need in order for the child to reach their full potential. Pettigrosso was told by her medical team and therapists that her now 14-year-old daughter Victoria would never walk or talk. She was determined to change that diagnosis, and with intense work, she succeeded. Victoria now walks and talks, and her mother is giving back to her community through her foundation. For information visit MSNF.ca.



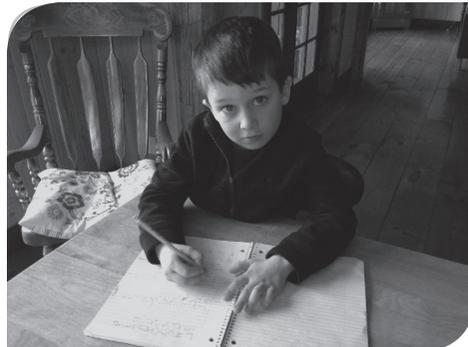
Montreal Special Needs Foundation Director Maddie Pettigrosso, Camelia Varga, Abby Kleinberg-Bassel, and Francesca Dansereau at the opening of the RDI Clinic at Abby's Office.



Warren Greenstone, Executive Director, Miriam Foundation with 2013 Miriam Foundation Heroes Isabelle Mercier, Lenore Vosberg, Stephannie Graddon representing Audrey Burt by proxy, Dr. Leyla Korany, Laurence Nadeau, and Nathalie Garcin, Executive Director, Gold Centre. (Photo credit, Howard Kay)

The Miriam Foundation honoured five women with the 2013 Miriam Foundation Hero Award (including **Lenore Vosberg** from CAHD). Audrey Burt, the mother of an autistic boy and a high school teacher, has raised funds and awareness for autism spectrum disorders (ASDs) on the South Shore of Montreal and in the racing world; **Dr. Leyla Korany**, a family doctor and parent of a child with an ASD, facilitated change to the curriculum at the University of Montreal so that all Residents will receive mandatory training on the early screening of children suspect of having an ASD; **Izabelle Mercier**, a specialized educator at l'École Marie-Rivier, attended one of the first TEACCH trainings and was involved in the creation of the first ever group of pre-kindergarten students; **Laurence Nadeau**, a mother of a son with an ASD, has published several articles in local newspapers and online, increasing awareness about autism and motivating people to make a difference. Congratulations to these five heroes among us.

The alliance of the eight **Physical Disability Rehabilitation Centres** (PDRC) of the Greater Montreal area (including Lucie-Bruneau, Constance-Leithbridge, and the MAB-Mackay), aim to sensitize the general public to all aspects of rehabilitation in physical disability, including the challenges that people with a motor, visual, hearing or language limitation face each day. Their public awareness campaign, **Prendre sa place**, 5th edition, gives a voice to children with a family member who has a physical disability, and helps us to better understand that rehabilitation helps not only the person receiving the services but the whole family as well. Check out their website to see eight video clips that reveal the



Six-year-old Thierry doing his homework. He has Neurofibromatosis type 1.

Neurofibromatosis is a genetic disorder which affects the skin and the nervous and skeletal systems. 40 to 60 percent of those affected with this disorder have learning disabilities, many of which are non-verbal. L'Association de la neurofibromatose du Québec's guide entitled *Learning difficulties observed in students with neurofibromatosis type 1*, helps students with neurofibromatosis who have learning difficulties, as well as teachers and professionals across Quebec. Written by **Marie-Josée Duchesne**, resource teacher at the Commission Scolaire de Montréal, it is available in English and French. Their video entitled *Emerging from the shadows / Sortir de l'ombre*, which features personal stories from people living with neurofibromatosis and commentaries by school professionals, is also available. Please visit www.amfq.org for information.



An Lap with his brother Lap-Nhan, a client of the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre. Both attend the Mackay Centre School. (Photo courtesy of, Prendre sa place)

secrets of 11 young people whose lives have been deeply touched by their loved ones with disabilities. Humourist **Christopher Hall** puts his interviewees at ease, allowing them to get straight to the heart of the matter. From the mouths of babes we learn a great deal about empathy and life. Don't miss these clips at <http://prendresaplace.com/en/the-clips/>.



Dr. Joe Schwarcz addresses the MCLD, with Nancy Feddersen, Pam Wener, Dr. Joe Schwarcz, Rosemary Short, Linda Aber, and Robin Bernstein.

Dr. Joe Schwarcz addressed **The Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities** about 'Scientific Confusion'. The Director of McGill University's Office for Science and Society, 'Dr. Joe' demystifies science and is a master at separating sense from nonsense. Almost every day we wake up to a new study claiming that yet another contaminant has been found in the environment that constitutes a risk to public health, like bisphenol A, phthalates, parabens and others. Dr. Joe provided a scientific evaluation of the risk-benefit ratio in order to clarify confusion in the decision making process, particularly for students with learning disabilities that are especially at risk. His message is clear – if it is not scientifically proven, proceed with caution, not confusion!



The Joolz Bar à Bijoux grand opening party with owner Lydia Mamane, Lisa Fischel, and FGA Certified Gemmologist Alessandra Di Geso.

The community came out in style to help **Lydia Mamane** celebrate the opening of her beautiful jewelry boutique **Joolz Bar à Bijoux**. Located in Westmount, Joolz offers a menu of stunning jewelry with something for everyone, no matter what age or price range. Bringing a new concept to the jewelry shopping experience, Joolz offers you a seat at the jewelry bar while you try items on for size, all while taking in the funky yet elegant décor. Mamane is an active member of the special needs community, in support of her 18-year-old son who has autism. A portion of the sales from her opening event were donated to the Giant Steps Foundation, which funds Giant Steps School. Mamane used her storefront to Light it Up Blue during Autism Awareness Month, and stocked several pieces of jewelry that promote the symbolic puzzle piece that has become synonymous with autism.



Laurence with her mother, a client of the Centre de réadaptation Lucie-Bruneau, and father (far right) along with Christopher Hall, actor-comedian and spokesperson for the 5th edition of the Prendre sa place campaign. (Photo courtesy of, Prendre sa place)

Erratum: In the last edition of Inspirations, the Notebook photo of Jonah Davis Yanofsky was misidentified as Tory Lackman. We apologize for the error.



Quebec Roots: The Place Where I Live:

Leaders on Wheels publish with the Blue Met Literary Festival

By Wendy Singer

The “Leaders on Wheels” (The Mackay Satellite Class at Westmount High School), are published authors! They participated in this year’s edition of Quebec Roots: The Place Where I Live, by contributing a chapter on what it is like to navigate the world in a wheelchair.

Coordinated by Line Richer, this initiative was developed in collaboration with the Ministère de l’Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport, and the Blue Metropolis Montreal International Literary Festival. It brings professional writers and photographers together with young Anglophones across Quebec to stimulate their creative and critical skills, develop their awareness about how Anglophones and their communities contribute to Quebec’s cultural diversity, and explore identity by examining the communities in which young people live.

With the guidance of Young Adult fiction author, journalist and teacher Monique Polak, professional photographer Monique Dykstra, and teacher Sebastian Pichette, the group extracted powerful thoughts that have the potential to change stereotypes and perceptions.

While Polak thoughtfully moulded ideas into compelling prose, Dykstra gave the students a crash course in photography, allowing students the opportunity to snap photos of one another.

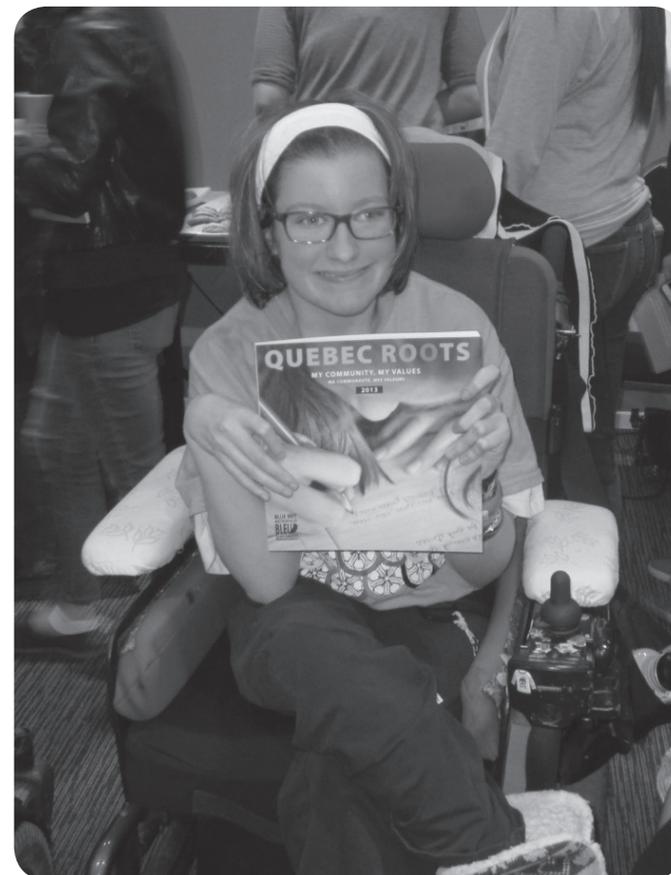
In her 30 years of teaching, Polak has never been more moved by a group of students: “They all have an openness, resilience, an interest in others and the greater world. They are a reminder of goodness, potential, and our capacity to overcome challenges.”



Leaders on Wheels with Monique Dykstra, Monique Polak, Rose Sondola and Sebastien Pichette.



Leaders on Wheels with teacher Sebastien Pichette and photographer Monique Dykstra.



Leader on Wheels Sam Chate at the Quebec Roots book launch.

The collection of personal anecdotes includes a powerful list of what the students want the world to know about them, and others that rely on wheelchairs:

- We don’t like it when you stare at us. We are not strange.
- Be friendly to us. We are regular kids who happen to go to school in wheelchairs. Yeah man!

- If you see us struggling to pick something up or open or close a door, ask us, “Do you need my help?” Don’t just walk past us without saying anything.

- Be patient with us. Some of us stutter or have difficulty speaking.

- We are powerful. We can do everything even if it is sometimes hard.

- Don’t feel sorry for us. We are happy.

“These students not only have a lot to teach us about being in a wheelchair, but also about having courage,” says Polak. That being said, she reminds us that these students are just regular teens, like all other high school students.

The Leaders on Wheels attended their book

launch at this year’s Blue Metropolis Montreal International Literary Festival. “This has been a great opportunity for the students to write stories and create images that will reach people outside their usual audience,” says Pichette.

The printed book is on sale at www.bluemetropolis.org. The free online book is also available.

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“I don’t like my manual wheelchair because though I can talk to the person pushing me, I can’t see her mood. When I’m in my power chair, the person can be beside me; I can talk to her and see her face.” Margot Vignal, Leader on Wheels

“My mom went in to get me souvlaki. It tasted pretty good. I think it would have tasted even better if I could have gone inside.” Justin Febrile, Leader on Wheels



Lester B. Pearson School Board's LIFE Program

By Celina Berubé

The Lester B. Pearson School Board LIFE (Learning Independence through Functional Education) Program has entered its second year. The LIFE Centre is located at Lindsay Place High School in Pointe Claire, and is a point of service option for all LBPSB students that are 18 years of age or older with special needs.

The LIFE program was created to service students with intellectual disabilities who have completed five years of high school and wish to continue their schooling until the age of 21 within the youth sector. This three year transition program is modeled after the Ministry's TEVA initiative (Transition École Vie Active/Transition from School to Independent Living), which uses individualized plans that are created by the LIFE educators, student, parents and community partners to prepare students for life outside of the school environment.

This program, in essence, prepares students with special needs for employment and/or volunteer work. Students do work place-



Friendship photo with Logan Quinn (left) and Nelson Lei (right).

(Photo credit, Cynthia Andersen)

ments outside of the school and within the centre. For example, they make beautiful painted cards that are sold at various community events, are responsible for the laminating needs of all schools within the board, and provide laundry service for sports teams.

In addition, they operate a small catering business, which provides baked goods for various school board functions.

The LIFE program has helped students familiarize themselves with community services such as transportation, community centers, libraries, etc., and further develops their communication skills for everyday living. It teaches the skills required for home

life, such as meal preparation, health and hygiene, safety, maintaining a living environment, and consumer habits.

As critical as these life skills are, the LIFE team recognizes the need to facilitate and encourage social interactions amongst the LIFE students with the expectation that the friendships that are formed during the three years are not only meaningful, but long lasting.

"Many young adults with special needs lose their social connection with peers once they have graduated from high school and long for other ways to feel like a part of society," says Cynthia Andersen, LIFE Teacher. "Friends in the LIFE Program support each other emotionally and provide companionship for community and school activities. In this way, they help each other enjoy new experiences and appreciate life more fully."

Breakfast Planning Meeting

Mondays always begin with a breakfast planning meeting, where students discuss current events and share personal stories. This time is used to plan out the week's activities/jobs. The team organizes ongoing leisure activities in the community – shopping, bowling, yoga, swimming, eating out in restaurants, and participating in the Special Olympics.

When asked what she liked best about LIFE, Jenna, a student, responded: "Everything! Just everything!"

Celina Berubé is a LBPSB Consultant for Special Needs (cberube02@lbpsb.qc.ca).

Therapeutic Laughter: Finding laughter through the tears

"Laughter gives us distance. It allows us to step back from an event, deal with it and then move on." - Bob Newhart

By Maia Aziz

Just as there is no right way to parent the average child, there is no right way to parent a child with special needs. Each parent treads a different path but one thing I know for sure is that love and laughter will go a long way to getting you through those tough moments, laughter connects us and a deep belly laugh will almost always make you feel better.

Laughter and having a sense of humour are universal coping strategies. Laughter reduces the negative emotional and physical consequences of stress and increases feelings of control and empowerment. It helps break the tension for you and for others. It gives you perspective and provides a moment of detachment, just long enough for you to catch your breath and keep going. Laughter boosts resilience.

John* was a new father. His son, Michael was born prematurely and with multiple impairments including a severe feeding disorder.

For his first years, Michael could only eat pureed foods delivered by syringe. For his parents, mealtimes were a source of daily stress as it always took a long time to feed the boy and they worried constantly about his growth and well-being. They were bone-tired and barely hanging on.

One day when Michael was two years old, John was on duty to feed him supper. He had baked and pureed some chicken and squash, cleaned and laid out the equipment and was ready to load it into the syringe. His son sat expectantly beside him in his adapted high chair. John filled the syringe and pushed the plunger slightly to get the air out, as he had hundreds of times before. Only this time, he misjudged the pressure ever so slightly and before he knew it, he had shot the entire contents all over the kitchen ceiling like some culinary missile.

In that moment, John had a choice. He could easily have just lost it and dissolved into a puddle of his own tears on the kitchen floor. He was already exhausted and frustrated

and now he was going to have to clean up and start all over. He couldn't even imagine the scaffolding he might have to erect to scrape the orange sludge off the ceiling fan. But instead, he looked over at his son, who was frozen in shock in his highchair, waiting silently to see what would happen next.

And without hesitation, John burst out laughing. He laughed and laughed and laughed. And when Michael saw this, he too started to laugh. And the two of them laughed and laughed until they were out of breath. And what could have become yet another painful memory for this young father, became one of his favorite stories of a time when he and his son shared a bonding moment of belly-aching laughter in their very messy kitchen.

*Names and some details have been modified to protect the privacy of those involved.

Maia Aziz P.S.W. is a social worker, Certified Laughter Yoga Leader and member of the AATH (Association of Applied and Ther-



apeutic Humor). The parent of an exceptional child herself, Maia works as a Program Manager at the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre and writes and speaks on how to cope with the inevitable daily challenges of being a caregiver, how to collaborate effectively with health professionals and how to never lose sight of what really matters. For more information visit www.facebook.com/withloveandlaughter or email maia@withloveandlaughter.ca.



Inspirations celebrates five years!

By Wendy Singer

Last November we celebrated Inspirations' fifth anniversary with a luncheon at the Marymount Academy library. This event brought so many of the people that have made Inspirations what it is today together, from professionals from the EMSB, to school principals and teachers, government officials, our advertisers and sponsors, award recipients and the community at large.

Johnny Piazza from Le Doral, which serves over 1,000 hot lunches a day to elementary school student across the island of Montreal, catered a delicious lunch. He went above and beyond, leaving no detailed unattended to, from elegant table dressings to an array of food choices including his signature six-star lasagna, and an exquisite tiramisu.

The room was decorated with cheerful blue, white and red balloon arrangements courtesy of Flowers by Pierre, wine was donated by Barefoot Wines, and Inspirations notepads were made by the students at Summit School's T.E.C.C. Copy and Print Centre. Beautiful signature pieces of art were on display courtesy of **Jason Goldsmith** of The Big Blue Hug. Guests were treated to entertainment by I Can Dream Theatre Group, and touching speeches in honour of our 2014 Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration award recipient, **Kaylie Bernert** from Ormstown Elementary School, NFSB. Westmount Liberal MP for Westmount-Ville-Marie **Marc Garneau**, and NDP MP for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce-Lachine **Isabelle Morin** spoke about the important work that Inspirations is doing for the special needs community.

Gracious thanks to an extraordinary planning team that included **Mona Kamel** and **Connie Primiano**, Inspirations Editor **Mike Cohen** for his vision, and **Lew Lewis**, Director, Student Services, EMSB and **Julie René de Côtret**, Assistant Director, Student Services, EMSB, for their unwavering support.

A very special thank you to **Linda Mahler**, Inspiration's Coordinator of Educational Outreach, for her devotion to Inspirations. Her creative vision made our event warm, friendly, special, and forever memorable.

Take a look at a video of this event, produced by Daniel Smajovits, at <http://vimeo.com/82034750>.



Linda Mahler, Connie Primiano and Wendy Singer present a Big Blue Hug painting to Johnny Piazza from Le Doral in thanks of his generosity sponsoring the luncheon.



Hanna Lusthaus and Linda Mahler present a beautiful speech to guests, describing that Hanna was the first student to be integrated into the former Protestant School Board of Greater Montreal.



The I Can Dream Theatre Group performed a heartwarming rendition of Moon River, sung by Steven Atme and Paul Baloukas and accompanied by Michele Matthews on the guitar.



Inspirations Team: Mike Cohen, Wendy Singer, Connie Primiano, Mona Kamel, Linda Mahler.



Back row: Heather Halman, Director of Adult Education and Vocational Training, SWLSB, Lew Lewis, Director of Student Services, EMSB. Front row: Julie René de Côtret, Assistant Director, Student Services, EMSB, Roma Medwid, Deputy Director General, EMSB.



Special thanks to Craig Olenik, Principal of Marymount Academy, for opening their library to us, David Mills, who helped out with audiovisual needs, Ramin Khodaie, and students who did a fantastic job helping out at the event.



The EMSB Translation duo of Liane Langlois and Aline Zarouian, Inspirations Sports Editor Daniel Smajovits, Brigitte Sellato, Mona Kamel, Inspirations Arts & Entertainment Editor Andrea Di Tomaso.



Hanna Lusthaus, Lori Rubin, Behaviour Management Specialist, EMSB, Despina Vassiliou, School Psychologist, EMSB, Irene Miller, Spiritual, Religious and Moral Education Consultant, EMSB, Rikee Gutherz-Madoff, Advertising and Sponsorship Specialist, Inspirations Newspaper, Patricia Willis, Chair of the Advisory Committee for Special Education Services, EMSB.



2014 Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration Kaylie Bernert receives her accolades, a painting from The Big Blue Hug, Cinémas Guzzo movie passes, a Tim Horton's gift card. With Lew Lewis, Wendy Singer, Kaylie Bernert, John Bernert, Linda Bernert, Ormstown Elementary School Principal David Brisebois, and Dynamic Funds representative Geneviève Perez.



We were delighted to have Liberal MP Marc Garneau say a few words in celebration of Inspirations.



Jeff Bergman with NDP MP Isabelle Morin, and Sophie Mohsen, Constituency assistant to Isabelle Morin.



Carol Meindl, Executive Director, Quebec Federation of Home & School Association, Gamoon Lau, Director, EDUCATE Montreal, Joanne Henrico, Educational Services, NFSB, Brenda Smylie, Coordinator of Complimentary Services, NFSB.



Martine Bouchard, Carmelina Pepe, Son Rise Therapist, Diane Du Sablon, representative from The Honourable Irwin Cotler, MP's office, and David Schipper, Director, Strategic Learning Centre.

Thank you for an invigorating anniversary celebration of Inspirations Newspaper. The formula was great, the people gathered were inspiring, and the purpose of your publication was felt throughout the room – your message and hard work are appreciated by all. Bravo!

Krista Leitham, Walk & Community Fundraising Manager
Autism Speaks Canada



Nick Katalifos, Principal of Pierre de Coubertin Elementary School and Special Advisor to Inspirations chats with Nick Primiano, Director of Giant Steps School.



Aline Romanos and Jason Devine from CTV, Kate Marien, Inspirations Copy Editor, and Stuart Nulman, Inspirations Book Reviewer.

Thank you for inviting me to your wonderful event. As I explained to Marc Garneau, when I'm in a room with Special Needs people, I am a part of a family and feel the warmth the entire time I am there. He felt it too.

Congratulations on all of your hard work both for this event and in general.

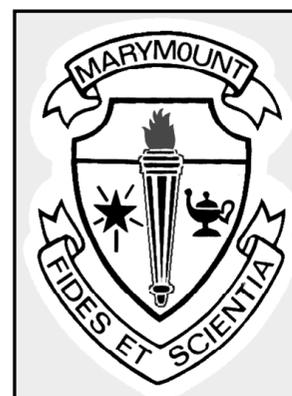
David Schipper, Director, Strategic Learning Centre



Marla Vineberg, Workshop Coordinator, Special Needs Planning for Nathan Leibowitz, and baby Owen.

 **T.E.C.C. Copy & Print Center**
Summit School's Copy Center is a non-profit Initiative that creates a dynamic "learn to work" environment for youth with special needs. Our students are actively involved in all stages of our Copy Center jobs.

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Yosef Robinson: A story of determination

By Rikee Gutherz-Madoff

When Yosef Robinson was a child he exhibited many symptoms of autism. At the age of two, a physician told his mother that he would probably never be able to attend school. He did not begin to speak until he was four years old.

His parents enrolled him at Giant Steps School in Montreal West, and with the dedication of Darlene Berringer, founder and past director of Giant Steps, the varied artistic programs the school offered, and the encouragement of his parents, Yosef began to communicate. With courage and determination, Yosef was able to overcome many obstacles.

He moved from Giant Steps to Hampstead School, and subsequently graduated from Hebrew Academy. To his family's delight, he had become a good student. His next step was attending a Yeshiva in Israel for one year.

Yosef earned his Bachelor of Arts with a major in Geography and a minor in Urban Studies at Rutgers University in New Jersey, and a Master of Arts in Urban Planning from Ohio State University. After a three-month internship in Cleveland, Ohio he accepted a position as a City Planner in Jacksonville Florida. Needless to say, all of these moves spawned Yosef's great passion for travel.

Currently, Yosef is a research assistant for author Pierre Anctil, Professor of History at the University of Ottawa focusing on Quebec and Montreal history, while he pursues his Masters in Judaic Studies.

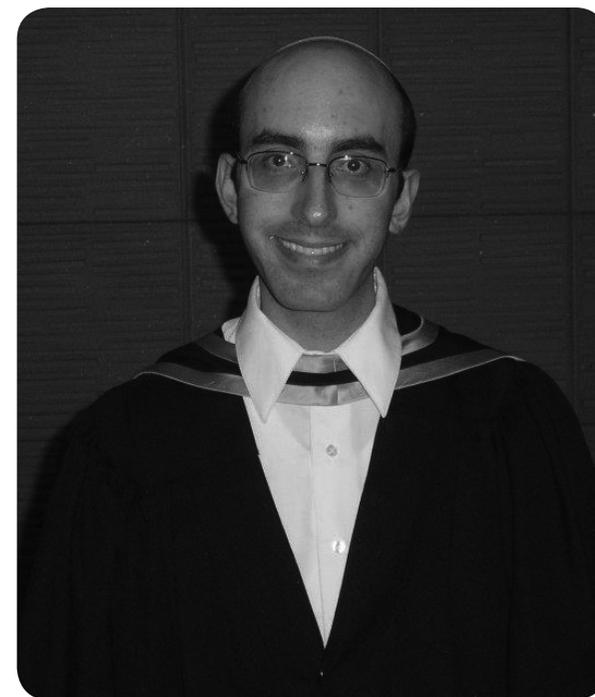
A religious soul, Yosef leads the Sabbath Services at Castel Royale in Saint-Laurent every Saturday morning, and leads morning services three days a week at The Donald Berman Maimonides Geriatric Centre.

Yosef's story represents an example of victory over seemingly insurmountable stumbling blocks. Yosef's father Professor Ira Robinson advises parents to never give up hope and faith for a better future, say-

ing, "Do not stop planning and working for that future even though that future may be completely unclear to you."

Ira shares a verse from Ecclesiastes 11:6 that he refers to in describing his convictions: "Sow your seed in the morning, and don't hold back your hand in the evening, since you don't know which is going to succeed, the one or the other, or if both are equally good."

After 30 years of conquering the various challenges that have presented themselves at each stage, what remains in the minds of Yosef's parents are the many people whose interventions allowed him to progress. "I truly thank G-d for Yosef's miraculous development and for guiding us to the right people, who were instrumental in his progress," adds Yosef's mother, Sandy Robinson.



Yosef Robinson

"Brain Frames®" Conference hosted by the Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development

By Carol Jazzar

The Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development, operated by the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) is mandated by the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport (MELS) to provide: support to schools and school boards, on-going professional development, research and development activities, and to contribute to the development of provincial expertise in the areas of speech and language development.

Last October, the Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development hosted a two-day conference for speech-language pathologists, resource teachers and other professionals at Le Centre Sheraton in downtown Montreal. The conference was attended by over 95 professionals and teachers from nine English language school boards in Quebec, private sector schools, and private clinics.

The guest presenter was Dr. Bonnie Sing-



Carol Jazzar and Dr. Bonnie Singer

er, the founder and CEO of Architects for Learning in Boston, Massachusetts. Dr. Singer is a speech-language pathologist with expertise in language, learning, and literacy in school-aged children and is passionate about working with students who

struggle academically. She, in partnership with her colleague Dr. Anthony Bashir, developed "Brain Frames®" - graphic scaffolds for language, literacy, teaching, and learning.

During the first day of the conference, participants learned how strategy-based instruction supports the development of skills that are central to language development and academic success, focusing specifically on how Brain Frames® graphics can be used to strengthen language, learning, and critical thinking. Each of the six Brain Frames® was presented and participants explored how each Brain Frame® could be used to meet a variety of instruction and assessment goals across grade levels and content areas. On the second day, deeper instructional practices were ex-

plained by introducing teaching routines for using Brain Frames® to strengthen reading comprehension, note taking, and oral expression skills.

This two-day conference received an overwhelmingly positive response by all who attended. We know that, as demonstrated during this conference, promoting a collaborative model of intervention between speech-language pathologists and teachers will help us better meet the needs of students who struggle academically.

For information on Brain Frames® visit www.architectsforlearning.com. For information on the Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development visit www.emsb.qc.ca.

Carol Jazzar is a speech-language pathologist at the EMSB and Coordinator of the Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development.



Understanding how the Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing access dental services

By Fahad Siddiqui

Trained as a dentist in Karachi, Pakistan, I worked at a hospital located in a neighbourhood - home to a culturally diverse population. Diversity has its perks, yet in clinics, it may present as a challenge in developing trustworthy 'dentist-patient' relationships. Positive relationships of this sort are central in dental care. To achieve this, a dentist needs to communicate appropriately by being sensitive to the sociocultural characteristics of patients. In my experiences, lack of such awareness can cause difficulties. My first encounter with these issues was with a patient who was Deaf, four years ago in Karachi.

Accompanied by a family member, the patient came to the hospital for teeth cleaning - one of the simplest procedures. I did not have a clue about the complexity of that situation until I started the procedure. I in-

stantly felt uncomfortable with communication as I had to rely on the family member. It was quite dissatisfying for me as a dentist. Are you okay? Are you comfortable? Does it hurt? These are routine questions dentists ask during procedures because they act as a guide to ensure patient's comfort.

It was there that I recognized gaps in my training for patients with special needs. In fact, that encounter was certainly transformative, leading to further realizations. It opened my eyes to challenges of my late grandfather who became Hard-of-Hearing during his last few years of life. An intelligent, well-educated man, with a charming personality, my grandfather often experienced isolation, misinterpretation, and the negative attitudes of society. These sensitive realizations inspired and led me to envision optimal dental care for this population.

With its potential to influence a mass population, I choose research as a tool to facilitate my aspirations. Here at McGill, I developed a project to understand challenges and identify possible solutions to optimize dental care experiences for Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing patients. Still in the preliminary stages of research, I have found oral health status and dental care utilization of this population to be below par. Communication differences have been linked to these discrepancies; however, explicit reasons are still unknown. On the other hand, health research on accessibility of services and clinical management has suggested that communication issues may just be the tip of the iceberg. In reality, these challenges may stem from historically embedded stigma and discrimination.

In dentistry, very little is known regarding

dental care of this population. It is alarming because knowledge that researchers produce influence policy, practice and education. Dental health is vital because diseases e.g., periodontitis are greatly linked to general diseases such as diabetes, lung and heart diseases. My research however is only the first few steps towards optimization of dental care experience for persons who are Deaf and Hard-of-Hearing. Indeed, a lot more has to be done!

Acknowledgments:

Funding Support: Centre de recherche du CSSS (CREMIS), Network for Oral and Bone Health Research (RSBO) and Faculty of Dentistry, McGill University.

Logistic Support: MAB-Mackay Centre.

Dr. Fahad Siddiqui is a Doctoral student at the Faculty of Dentistry, McGill University.

The Oasis Room: A sanctuary for students with special needs

By Chrissy Mohammed

Inspired by her experiences as coordinator of Complimentary Services for Riverside School Board (RSB) and her new role as vice-principal at St. Lawrence Elementary School in Candiac, Valérie Bergeron has come up with an innovative plan to create an Oasis room to better support the students with special needs.

Valérie devised a detailed plan to create a safe and calm place where students with sensory sensitivities, social and/or behavioural difficulties or anxiety could go to calm down. It began with professional development for all: teachers, specialists, technicians, attendants and the administration. Martine Demers, Behaviour Consultant at RSB, was enlisted to help build a foundation, a common understanding and a common language of the psychological and emotional development of all students, which in turn would support the Oasis Room.

Twenty-six staff members committed to participate in the Distance Education course The Teachability Factor by Dr. Gordon Neufeld. After a year of professional development, the Oasis Room opened its doors with the help of dedicated attendant Na-

thalie Turgeon. Together, Nathalie, Valérie and Martine created a room that has a quiet space with cushions, a tent and stuffed animals. A student coming in to visit called it a place to "freak out and then go back to class". It has a lunch area with a long table and chairs, which Nathalie describes as a place where they can eat together as a family. It also has a computer space, and a place for games, books, puzzles and Legos.

Nathalie opens the Oasis every morning when the students arrive, at recess and at lunch to those students referred by teachers. Patrick Gaudreau-Weaver, a Grade 6 student who uses the Oasis often, has designed a logo to explain the Oasis Room as "a sanctuary where you are protected. A room that is calm, light and safe."

The Oasis is still a work in progress but has already made a tremendous difference to students like Patrick. The team at St. Lawrence would like the future of the Oasis Room to include teaching social skills and more personalized and meaningful interventions to each student that needs a place like this.

When asked about the benefits of the Oasis Room, Colleen Lauzier, Principal at St. Lawrence said, "One student struggling impacts other students around them. The Oasis



Colleen Lauzier principal of St. Lawrence, Patrick Gaudreau-Weaver, Nathalie Turgeon, attendant, Valérie Bergeron, VP of St. Lawrence. (Photo credit, Chrissy Mohammed)

Room supports the struggling student and by extension the entire school". The Oasis Room in its early stages has already gone beyond their expectations and with the entire school team actively involved and on board to support it, its value and worth can only continue to grow.

Chrissy Mohammed is a Cycle 1 teacher with an M.Ed in Inclusive Education at St. Johns School in St Jean-sur-Richelieu. She was the 2012 Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration.



A young author, his sister and their 'Tails': Tommy and Melanie speak about bullying, and Cornelia de Lange Syndrome

By Tova Havis

Herzliah High School Secondary I and Talmud Torah Grade 5 and 6 students were treated to an extraordinary presentation by 10-year-old author Tommy Glatzmayer. Tommy's sister Melanie was born with a rare medical syndrome called Cornelia de Lange (CdLS) - a genetic disorder that causes a range of physical, cognitive and medical challenges including slow growth, intellectual disability, small stature, and distinctive facial features. There are only 100 known cases of CdLS in Canada.

When Tommy was six-years-old, he wrote a book to help explain CdLS to his friends. When he was in Grade 1, he came home crying because his sister was being teased. His mother Nathalie, decided it was time to self-publish Tommy's book.

Seven thousand copies of this book have been sold since June 2010, and in 2013 a second book, under the same title, *Melanie and Tommy have two pet rats and one Syndrome*, was released. Tommy was honoured with the 2012 Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Award for his important role in creating awareness for this very rare congenital disease.

Tommy and Melanie now go on tour with

their pet rats to sensitize people about differences and tolerance. Tommy explains that his sister is a wonderful person and lots of fun. He wants everyone to know that people with differences should not be bullied. Tommy's message to our students was simple yet powerful: "If you see someone different, smile and say hi."

The presentation included a video about rats and then cheering them on in an actual rat race, and an animated question and answer period. "This presentation was really inspiring and touching," shared Secondary I student Hannah Kalin, "Everyone in our audience was fascinated by this story and by their pet rats. I think Tommy and Melanie's positive attitude profoundly touched my classmates."

The Glatzmayer family was invited to share their story through Herzliah's unique Secondary I Student Advisor program. Overseen by Assistant Principal Shelley Mann, this program is designed to facilitate the transition from elementary school to high school and to give the students an opportunity to learn new and important skills and values. "Our students meet regularly in small groups with their teacher as a facilitator to learn about important study and organizational skills," shares Mann. "Much time is spent on the importance of getting along with peers and the unacceptable behaviours associated with bullying. This program rein-



Herzliah High School students listen to Tommy Glatzmeyer talk about his sister, Melanie, and his reasons for writing a book.

forces these important values that we teach every day."

Tommy and Melanie have made over 60 presentations in schools, hospitals, fundraisers, and conferences. Tommy has spread his message of acceptance and has created awareness for CdLS to over one million people.

For more information on this amazing family and have them visit your school, or to learn about CdLS, visit <http://www.2petrats.com>.

Tova Havis is the Communications Officer at Talmud Torah / Herzliah High School.



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New at Inspirations

Visit our new blog The Inspired Blogger - special needs in Montreal at <http://inspirationsnewsmtl.blogspot.ca>. We're blogging about events in our community. If you have a topic you'd like to feature on our blog, let us know at info@inspirationsnews.com.

The Inspirations *EXPRESS* is our new online edition in-between editions. Keep up to date on all the news.

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Galileo Adult Education Centre – a melting pot of positive action

By Louise Panet-Raymond, Laura Hutchinson, and Anna Persichilli

The Special Needs Program at Galileo Adult Education Centre is an integral part of the school. The special needs teachers are always looking for ways to integrate their students into the mainstream school population. From the popular Galileo Café to the Positive Attitude Project, the special needs students at Galileo have made their presence felt, in a positive way, throughout the school.

Small groups of language students toured the special needs classrooms, guided by some of the most verbal special needs students, giving language students the opportunity to express themselves in their new language. After the 20-minute tour, language students discuss how the activity made them feel, and how special needs individuals are viewed and treated in their respected countries. Both groups gain confidence and self-esteem. A win-win situation for all involved.



Tania and Nancy serving at St. Michael's mission.

Mission, preparing bags of food, cooking and serving lunch, clearing tables and listening to stories of the human struggle and perseverance. "I was a little scared that I wouldn't do a good job. Now I feel better about myself and my ability to help others," said student Caterina.

"It was very touching to see everyone at the mission. I learned to never take anything for granted," said student Tania P.

Students would like to continue volunteer-

"Project Positivity" began after Social Integration Service (S.I.S.) students read an article in the Montreal Gazette titled "A school project worthy of note" that addressed ending negative self-talk. Students create positive messages and phrases and post them throughout the school with the goal of brightening someone's day and spreading positivity. Due to an excellent response, S.I.S. students have visited each class and invited all students to get involved. Follow "Project Positivity" on Instagram: #galileo-positiveproject.

S.I.S. students Nancy Leopardi and Caterina Pupo participated in a contest organized by The Leadership Committee for English Education in Québec's (LCEEQ) that asked EMSB students to present how they use social media for educational purposes. They shared how they used Instagram to spread their positivity messages. Nancy Leopardi was a finalist for the contest!

S.I.S. students volunteered at St. Michael's

ing, and with the help of George Greene General Director of St. Michael's Mission, they have recruited other Galileo students to join them.

The Chuck Close Project is an in-depth look into the artwork of professional American artist Chuck Close, well known for his large self-portraits. The students relate to Close's own struggles with learning disabilities and physical limitations due to spinal cord injury. In honour of Close, the students are creating a collaborative large portrait.

The S.I.S. students prove that with passion, interest and enthusiasm they can accomplish anything they put their minds to. From cabinet making at Rosemount Technology Centre to the Galileo Olympics, and a production of the musical Grease, the students and staff at Galileo are looking forward to continuing this educational journey.

Louise Panet-Raymond, Laura Hutchinson, and Anna Persichilli are S.I.S Teachers at Galileo Adult Education Centre.



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Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen



NEW YORK CITY: My family and I recently returned from a busy four day stop in New York City, where we saw two spectacular Broadway musicals (Pippin and Kinky Boots), stayed at a sensational luxury hotel (The Sofitel) and enjoyed a restaurant experience (TAO) we won't soon forget.

New York appreciates its Canadian tourists. This has been underlined in recent years by the establishment of an NYC & Company office right at 99 Blue Jays Way in Toronto. By logging on to www.nycgo.com you can begin planning your activities.

BROADWAY: Unquestionably "the draw" in New York City remains its extraordinary Broadway productions. Be prepared to pay big dollars, even for a seat that is the second to last spot in the house at the top. Here is a tip though. Go online via Ticketmaster or Telecharge, check out the precise availability and call the toll free number so that you can get a more accurate route of what is available. While they offer to mail the tickets at least 48 hours before the show, we recommend that you either print them out online or ask to pick them up at will call. In some cases you can even buy cancellation insurance.

Kinky Boots and Pippin represent two "can't miss" choices. These Tony Award winning musicals were so good you can count me in to see them again if the opportunity presents itself.

In Kinky Boots (www.kinkybootsthemusical.com), Charlie Price has reluctantly in-

herited his father's shoe factory, which is on the verge of bankruptcy. Trying to live up to his father's legacy and save his family business, Charlie finds inspiration in the form of drag queen Lola. A fabulous entertainer some sturdy stilettos, Lola turns out to be the one person who can help Charlie become the man he's meant to be. As they work to turn the factory around, this unlikely pair finds that they have more in common than they ever dreamed possible and discover that when you change your mind about someone, you can change your whole world. Inspired by a true story and based on the Miramax motion picture written by Geoff Deane and Tim Firth, Kinky Boots features a warm and witty book by Harvey Fierstein and a richly diverse musical score from pop icon Cyndi Lauper, in her stunning theatrical debut. Tickets for Kinky Boots (\$87 - \$157) are available for purchase in person at the Al Hirschfeld Theatre box office, online at www.telecharge.com, or by calling Telecharge at 800-432-7250 or 212-239-6200.

Pippin (www.pippinthemusical.com), meanwhile, is back on Broadway for the first time since it thrilled audiences 40 years ago, having won the 2013 Tony Award for Best Musical Revival. With a score by Tony nominee Stephen Schwartz (Godspell, Wicked), Pippin tells the story of a young prince on a death-defying journey to find meaning in his existence. Will he choose a happy, but simple life? Or will he risk everything for a singular flash of glory? It arrived on Broadway direct from an acclaimed run at Boston's American Repertory Theater. This captivating new production is directed

by Tony winner Diane Paulus (Hair and The Gershwins' Porgy and Bess). It features sizzling choreography in the style of Bob Fosse and breathtaking acrobatics by Les 7 doigts de la main of Montreal. Pippin is playing at the Music Box Theatre (239 W 45th Street). Tickets are available via Telecharge: 212-239-6200, 800-432-7250 or online at www.pippinthemusical.com.

The Al Hirschfeld Theatre is located at 302 West 45th Street, between 8th and 9th Avenues. There is a wheelchair accessible restroom (unisex) available on the lobby level. There are no steps into the theatre from the sidewalk. Wheelchair seating and assisted listening systems are available. The Music Box Theatre is not completely wheelchair accessible. There are no steps into the theatre from the sidewalk. Where there are steps either into or within the theatre, there is no assistance available. Seating is accessible to all parts of the Orchestra without steps. Wheelchair seating is available in the Orchestra only. Handrails are available at the end of every stepped seat row in the Mezzanine. A wheelchair accessible restroom is available on the main floor.

WHERE TO STAY: My family and I have indeed experienced heaven. That is because we spent four nights in a gorgeous luxury suite at the Sofitel New York (www.sofitel.com), located at 45 West 44th Street, a very short walk from Times Square and Broadway theatres. For us, the location could not have been better.

This elegant 30-storey midtown Manhattan hotel is just a stone's throw from Fifth Avenue. There are 398 spacious rooms on 30 floors, including 52 suites and one presidential suite all featuring Sofitel's luxurious feather-top and duvet sleep system - SoBed. The executive suites encompass a bedroom with a separate seating/work area, which can be closed off from each other for in-suite meetings. Most suites have southern exposure, offering a downtown view. Five terrace suites have outdoor terraces with commanding views of Manhattan. While the bed in our main bedroom was as comfortable as can be, the sofa bed also got very high marks. Seldom have I seen a hide a bed mattress as perfect as this one. There is excellent cupboard space, bathrobes and slippers to use during your stay and an in-room safe with plenty of room to place your valuables.

Elegantly decorated with Paris-meets-New York motifs, all guestrooms have a spacious marble bathroom, three telephone lines, broadband Internet access and fully stocked mini-bars. Room service is available 24 hours along with international newspapers; nightly turn-down service with Evian water; and imported French bath products. There is a fully equipped fitness centre on the basement floor.

The Sofitel New York first opened on July 14, 2000. It caters to upscale business and leisure travelers seeking a classic, yet contemporary, "home away from home" while travelling. From the moment you check in, via a series of "Bonjour," you are treated like royalty. The lobby is large, warm and

welcoming, with the concierge ready to guide you. Staff here speaks 52 different languages and there is a French-speaking ambassador in each hotel department. Upon check-in, the hotel will valet park your car at the Hippodrome facility across the street and have it ready for you when checking out.

The hotel boasts seven meeting rooms perfect for small to mid-sized meetings, with rooms ranging from 365 to 760 square feet. Rooms are designed to meet specific meeting needs, from video-conferencing to breakout work sessions and computer access for company training sessions. The Grand Ballroom offers 2,500 square feet of space to seat up to 180 people. There are handicapped rooms available while all rooms can accommodate wheelchairs as well as the visually and hearing impaired.

For reservations, call 1-800-Sofitel (763-4835).

HOTEL DINING: On the evening we arrived we decided to dine at Gaby, a traditional French brasserie and bar named for a Parisian model who made a name and career for herself in New York in the 1920s. Just off the lobby of the hotel, the restaurant seats 128 people. There is easy interior access for hotel guests and an entrance on 45th Street. There is a special lift at the Gaby entrance for those in wheelchairs.

Executive Chef Sylvain Harribey has been in New York for five years, having previously worked for the Sofitel in Philadelphia and Bordeaux, France. His culinary achievements include winning first place on the hit Food Network show called Chopped. This is a classy restaurant, popular not only with hotel guests but those going to a Broadway show. Pre-theatre menus do exist here. The restaurant is open all day, beginning at breakfast and for lunch as well. Among its special menus is 30-minute business lunches served in bento boxes for executives on the go.

We enjoyed an absolutely outstanding dinner at Gaby, having the great advantage of meeting Harribey in person. He first prepared a marvellous and tasty butternut squash cappuccino, with truffle oil and fleur de sel. This was followed by a unique spring lobster salad, featuring some sumptuous lobster, fruits, avocados and greens. There were two main courses: oven roasted lamb loin, crusted with Dijon mustard, white bean puree with pumpkin seed oil, vegetable tian gratine and Harribey's own creation called the Franburger. This was served on a crispy baguette with melted brie cheese, caramelized onion and piment d'Espelette pepper aioli and French Fries on the side. We shared



The Sofitel New York is ideally situated.



some extraordinary desserts: a crème brûlée, a chocolate lava cake with vanilla ice cream and a chocolate chip and raisin pudding with cinnamon ice cream.

DINING OUT: New York City is indeed the place to dine, with an endless array of choices to please your palate. Needless to say, there is no shortage of kosher restaurants here either.

The one restaurant we had heard a lot about was TAO (www.taogroup.com), the pioneers of the Pan-Asian trend that swept New York City over a decade ago. We dined at TAO Uptown; the chain recently unveiled TAO Downtown and they are in Las Vegas as well.

Since its inception in 2000, TAO Uptown at 42 East 58th Street, has become well-known for spurring the trend of “vibe-dining,” has been a national and international hotspot. TAO Downtown is located beneath the Maritime Hotel.

Upon entering the restaurant, one is immediately struck by a 16-foot Buddha floating above a reflecting pool filled with Japanese carp. The Pan Asian restaurant specializes in authentic Hong Kong Chinese, Japanese and Thai cuisines. There are three levels of dining, including the prized “Skybox” which offers views of what once was a movie theatre. Tao has 300 seats, a sushi bar, lounge and two bars at which to enjoy the food and the show. Be sure to make reservations. As GM Keith Dorrow told us, “we are always busy.”

There is a wonderful ambiance here, with trendy music and a charismatic serving staff. The menu here is truly designed for sharing. Our waiter, Hutch, made life so much easier for our group by recommending a series of courses. It is as if he read our minds. We started off with some appetizers: hot edamame and roasted shishito peppers. That was followed by spicy tuna tartar on crispy rice,



Tao Uptown is one of New York City's finest restaurants.

six pieces we split among us happily. The Peking duck spring rolls, with hoisin sauce, were deliciously crispy but the outstanding item of the night which I strongly recommend was the satay of Chilean sea bass with wok-roasted asparagus. I cannot remember tasting any kind of fish this good. The lobster and shrimp spring roll with shiitake mushrooms and spicy pineapple sauce was a treat, a bit spicy but nothing too difficult to handle.

TAO has a magnificent sushi menu. You can study the options via their menu. Hutch selected some fantastic pieces for us. There was still more to come. The wok-seared New York sirloin with shiitake mushrooms cut like butter and was served with some crispy roasted potato wedges. An order of crispy orange chicken, beautifully prepared scallops and some white rice rounded out the main course. Did we have room for dessert? First came the sugar dusted doughnuts with a trio of dipping sauces – caramel, chocolate and vanilla. This was delicious beyond description. The banana pudding with fortune cookie crust and the lemongrass crème brûlée were dandy as well.

There is easy street-level access by wheelchair. When making your reservation, ask for a table at the main level where there are no stairs.

BREAKING UP THE DRIVE: If you are travelling with passengers who have special needs, it is always a good idea to break up the trip. Consider staying over in Saratoga and the Hampton Inn and Suites (www.saratogaspringssuites.hamptoninn.com). This one is located at 25 Lake Avenue.

The Hampton Inn & Suites Saratoga Springs Downtown is probably one of the nicest properties from this brand that I have come across, having opened just over five years ago. It is part of the Turf Hotels group. The first thing you will notice is the majestic entrance. Upon checking in your room key grants you entrance to free covered parking on a multi-level garage. There are 123 guest rooms and suites featuring king-or queen-sized beds. Some suites have spacious balconies and separate living rooms with sofa beds. We booked the latter and were pleasantly surprised by how extraordinarily large the unit was. I particularly liked the ultra-comfortable chairs in front of the two TVs. It is fully wheelchair accessible, via its walkway from the garage to

the large size elevators.

BUFFALO, NEW YORK: My family and I recently spent some time in Buffalo, New York to visit friends. Buffalo (www.visitbuffaloniagara.com) is the commercial, political and entertainment hub of an eight-county region of western New York State consisting of nearly 1.6 million people. Located at the easternmost end of Lake Erie, overlooking the Niagara River, Buffalo is just across the Peace Bridge from Ontario.

Buffalo is only a 20-minute drive to and from Niagara Falls and its array of world class tourist attractions, including the Maid of the Mist sightseeing boat and the Cave of the Winds, a web of wooden catwalks and staircases accessed through a tunnel in the rock behind the American Falls that provide spectacular up-close views of the cataract.

Here is something I did not know. Buffalo is home to the only “bricks and mortar” museum in the U.S. dedicated to the history of people with disabilities called The Museum of disABILITY History. It is located at 3826 Main Street. Visitors and those who see its travelling exhibits, enjoy wide-ranging topics like disability and pop culture, the wide world of disability and sports, and the evolution of adaptive equipment, among many others, illustrated by photos, rare books and historic artifacts - truly a unique experience. Group tours are available. To schedule a tour, call 716-629-3626, 716-629-3626 or log on to <http://museumofdisability.org>.

WHAT TO DO: There is wonderful shopping, museums, a great zoo, an amusement park, a Dave and Busters restaurant/amusement centre and a fabulous Regal Transit Center Stadium 18 & IMAX at 6707 Transit Road in Williamsville. I always enjoy seeing a movie at the Regal chain (www.regalmovies.com). As the name of the complex says, this is stadium seating. There is a large parking lot and very friendly staff.

For special needs patrons, most of the movies shown offer closed captioned equipment upon request. There are listening devices for the hearing impaired and wheelchair access. Go to their website and at the bottom of the homepage under Theatres, click on the Captioning and Descriptive Video link. This page will provide you with a list of theatres, sorted by state. Click on the state in which your theatre is located. This page will provide a list of what movies are being shown that offer the captioning and descriptive audio, as well as their show times. If you go online to Fandango.com and locate the theatre, movie and showtime the website will list if closed captioning is available for that performance. Upon arriving at the theatre location, printed materials are available that explain how to use the closed caption-

ing system. Staff members and managers are knowledgeable on the closed captioning system and can assist with any specific questions you may have.

WHERE TO STAY: In terms of accommodations, we were very fortunate to come across the brand new Staybridge Suites Buffalo Amherst, at 1290 Sweet Home Road, adjacent to the University at Buffalo –SUNY North Campus. Resting on the eastern shore of Lake Erie, the suburb of Amherst provides great access to entertainment, restaurants and attractions. Buffalo Niagara International Airport (BUF) is eight miles away. It turned out to be an excellent location. Having only opened on November 11, 2013, general manager Shannon Ruth, assistant GM Sarah Esposito and their team really provide a welcoming atmosphere.

This is an extended stay pet friendly hotel, which offers studios, one bedroom and two bedroom/two bathroom suites, as well as an indoor saltwater pool, a fitness room, an in-season BBQ Pavillion with grills and complimentary guest laundry. You also get a full hot breakfast each morning, along with evening social receptions Tuesday through Thursdays. We chose the two bedroom option and for three of us it offered the kind of personal space one is not normally accustomed to during a family stay in a hotel. With a king size bed (and one amazingly comfortable reading chair) in the master bedroom, two double beds in the other and a pullout couch in the living room two families could happily share the premises. We also appreciated the 24 hour free coffee, tea, hot chocolate, milk, juices and soft drinks, the “Great Room” where you can hang out with business associates and the “Den,” filled with books, games and lots of comfy little nooks.

Each hotel room is furnished with a 42 inch flat screen HD TV, DVD players, iPod docking stations, alarm clocks and fully equipped kitchens, complete with pots, pans and utensils. There is good workspace and wireless internet. This property even has additional storage units available on each floor.

This is the eighth property opened by the folks at Ellicott Development and over the next couple of years they plan many more. You can see the others at <http://www.ellicottdevelopment.com/portfolio/hotels>. They range from luxury boutique to other extended stay locales. You can call 1-877-660-8550 for reservations or do so online at www.staybridgesuites.com/amherstny.

The Staybridge Suites is well equipped for guests with special needs. This includes the public entrance, guest rooms, the registra-

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tion desk, the dining area, the exercise facility, the pool and the business center. In fact, both the pool and whirlpool are furnished with lifts for the handicapped. The hotel provides accessible self parking, van accessible self parking, communications kits with visual alarms and notification devices, TTY for guest use and closed caption televisions.

TORONTO'S HOCKEY HALL OF FAME: On my most recent trip to Toronto I visited the Hockey Hall of Fame, a first for me.

Wheelchairs can reach every area in the Hockey Hall of Fame. For guests with wheelchairs there is an elevator located beside the steps to the Great Hall. The Hall also has one wheelchair for guests that might need it. There is no charge, although they require an imprint of a major credit card. If you intend to use this service, it is recommended you call ahead to reserve at 416-360-7735 ext. 231.

For more than two decades I have been visiting Toronto (www.seetorontonow.com) at least once a year. There were times that for work purposes I'd be there as often as once a month, yet for some reason I never made it a priority to visit the Hockey Hall of Fame (www.hhof.com). During my most recent stop, I made it a priority to place this on my agenda. It is located downtown in Brookfield Place at the corner of Yonge and Front Streets.

Visitors are told to pretty much allocate several hours to explore Toronto's premier hockey attraction and I did just that. Montreal fans will enjoy experiencing a replica of the Canadiens dressing room at the old Forum, complete with sweaters of such greats as Ken Dryden and Guy Lafleur. There are small and large TV monitors in various sections and in the Habs room you can hear the golden voice of our very own



The Staybridge Suites Buffalo Amherst opened last fall.

Dick Irvin narrating a film about Stanley Cup dynasties.

WHERE TO STAY: I like to stay downtown when visiting Toronto and for my family nothing beats a two bedroom suite at The Grand Hotel and Suites (www.grandhoteltoronto.com), located at the corner of Jarvis and Dundas. This is a great area to select as a base for it is in such a dynamic location. First and foremost, the amazing Eaton Centre (www.torontoeatoncentre.com) is just a few blocks away. Besides its endless array of stores and kiosks, there is an Indigo bookstore, a number of restaurants and the busy urban eatery food court, which can serve your dinner needs at good prices on a daily basis. Dundas Square, across the street, is Toronto's answer to Times Square and always full of action. The Theatre District is nearby. We took advantage of the hotel's daytime shuttle service, which took us door to door wherever we wanted to go.

The Grand Hotel and Suites is only 14 years old and still looks spanking new. It features 177 extraordinary guest suites. For families, the junior two bedroom suites feature spacious living room/work areas separated from the two bedroom areas by sets of double French glass doors with vertical blinds. The bedrooms areas contain king and queen size beds, LCD TVs and dual-line telephones with data port. A separate living area contains a double sofa bed, TV, DVD Player, CD Player and a work desk with a dual-line telephone. There is a fully equipped kitchenette with a microwave, fridge, coffeemaker and cutlery. We got one of the recently refurbished second floor rooms.

You can slip into a plush bathrobe, use the iron and ironing board and enjoy the convenience of the laptop size in-room safe. There is complimentary wireless Internet access in each room. Indeed this place has all of the comforts of home and more, which is why many guests capitalize on the options of extended stay packages for 21 consecutive days or more. The kitchenette is a definite bonus and something kosher guests in particular will find useful as they can prepare some of their own meals. A very large Metro supermarket is just a block and a half away. The suite has ample cupboard space to pack away the groceries.

All guests get to enjoy a splendid breakfast buffet, free of charge, with an extensive array of items to choose from. There is also a fitness

centre, the two-storey neo-classical pool indoor pool (surrounded by exquisite hand painted murals) and two whirlpools on the rooftop garden, which provides a panoramic view of Toronto. The latter is a real plus and an area guests take advantage of year-round, even with below zero temperatures. When darkness falls, movies and television shows are piped on to a large white screen.

There is 24 hour room service, twice-daily maid service, valet and underground parking, a friendly concierge, a restaurant, 10,000 square feet of meeting space and a fully equipped business centre. Shuttle services are available to anywhere in the financial core. Make sure to bring your Aeroplan card in order to earn 500 miles per night.

Having the two distinct bedrooms and the middle area was a bonus I would recommend for a family spending multiple days together in a hotel room, providing just the necessary privacy.

DINNER: The Shore Club (www.theshoreclub.ca) on Wellington Street turned out to be a real treat. It is fully wheelchair accessible, with all of the tables at the same main level.

A vibrant restaurant and cocktail bar offering up lively ambiance, The Shore Club (which also has an Ottawa locale) is memorable for its atmosphere, professional service and outstanding cuisine. Located in the new RBC Dexia Centre, the restaurant is situated in Toronto's bustling Entertainment District and is just steps away from prominent cultural venues such as Roy Thomson Hall, David Pecaut Square and TIFF Bell Lightbox, making it an ideal pre-performance dinner destination. It's also within walking distance of the financial district, Rogers Centre and the Metro Toronto Convention Centre. Valet parking is available next door at the Ritz Carlton.

We started off by sharing an amazing Single Tier Seafood Tower featuring a king crab dip, won ton, oysters, clams, mussels and jumbo shrimp while also opting for the grilled marinated wild mushrooms. The menu includes numerous other sumptuous choices such as fried calamari, steamed clams, dungeness crab cake, apple cider smoked salmon and vanilla-battered prawns. There are a number of soups and



The Museum of disABILITY History is a unique Buffalo attraction.

salads. As for the main courses, you have a choice between seafood specialties such as salmon wellington, maple-glazed king salmon, smoked Alaskan black cod, herb-dusted sea bass and stuffed rainbow trout and steakhouse favorites like the New York strip, filet mignon, braised short ribs and double-cut lamb chops. As for sides and add-ons, there are no less than 21 selections from mashed potatoes and steakhouse fries to tempura-battered onion rings, fresh asparagus and braised fennel. We all went the steak and lobster route, enjoying every morsel of each. Yes, we saved just enough room for some home made desserts : a spectacular Black Forest cake and some keylime pie.

With its luxurious, contemporary décor, The Shore Club elevates dining to a true feast for the senses. The interior, curated by renowned designer Elaine Thorsell, pays homage to art deco ocean liners, boasting soaring ceilings, a palette of cool blue and green hues and stunning original artwork.

Mike Cohen is the editor of *Inspirations*. He can be reached at mcohen@inspirations-news.com. See his travel advice column at www.sandboxworld.com/travel.



The Hockey Hall of Fame is wheelchair accessible.



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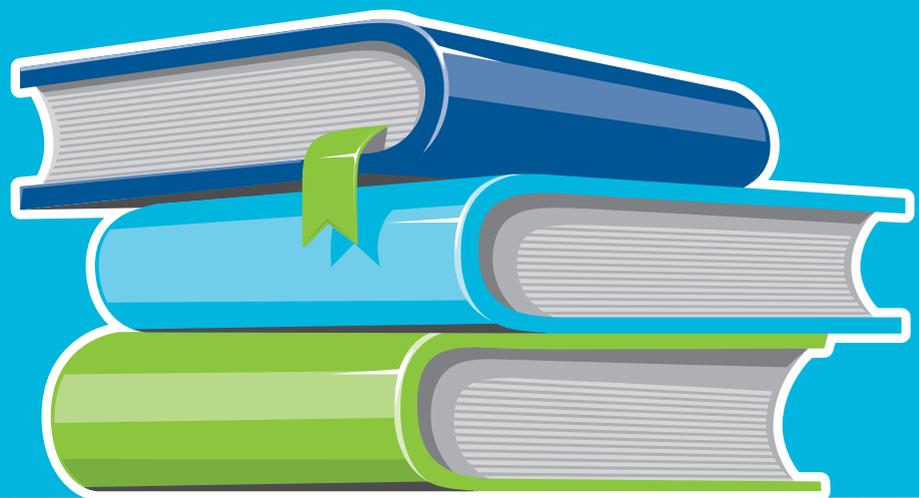
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