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Teen living with SMA inspires others to stay positive, dream big

By Valentina Basilicata

Like many recent high school graduates, Sammy Cavallaro has exciting plans for his future. It's not surprising the 17-year-old honour student is pursuing a business marketing degree at John Abbott College. This young entrepreneur already has over two million followers on his sports-related Instagram page (@sickhighlights) and plans to launch a related clothing line in the near future. What's Sammy's secret to staying motivated? "My motto in life is, 'everyday is a good day,'" he says.

Sammy was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) at nine months. This genetic motor neuron disease affects the part of the nervous system that controls voluntary muscle movement. "SMA makes

independence for Sammy impossible," explains his mother Rosa Mariani. "He needs to be dressed, fed, rolled at night, scratched, placed in his motorized wheelchair and taken out. Basically everything that you do for yourself on a daily basis, he needs someone to do for him." Nevertheless, she adds, he is "always very grateful for what life gives him," and there is "never a complaint from his lips."

Though his parents were told he would not live past the age of two, and despite undergoing major surgery to correct a debilitating spinal scoliosis, Sammy continues to thrive and succeed both academically and socially.

Read the full story on page 14 of this edition...

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The Cavallaro family celebrate at Sammy's graduation ceremony. (Photo credit, Cavallaro family)

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FROM THE HOUSE with MP Mike Lake

Jaden: A partner in life, love, adventure and advocacy

By Hayley Chazan

OTTAWA -- It was a cold Alberta day between Christmas and New Years when Mike Lake stopped for takeout at the McDonalds in West Edmonton Mall with his then nine-year-old autistic son Jaden. There were over 70 people in line and more employees than usual serving the holiday-crazed crowd.

Normally, when Lake takes his son on outings, he keeps a tight grip and a close watch. But this time, Lake's hands were full and Jaden took off. "He had a smile on his face and I knew I was in trouble," Lake recalled lovingly.

Squealing with excitement, Jaden ran in front of everyone waiting in line and ducked behind the counter, pushing the workers out of his way. "He grabbed a handful of crushed Smarties right out of the bin and shoved them in his face," Lake said. "That's Jaden. He sees Smarties, he wants Smarties and he goes and gets them."

Jaden, now 22, is unable to converse through words. Lake describes him as a three or four-year-old trapped in the body of a young adult. Emotions are particularly challenging for him and he has trouble navigating the abstract. "Many people go through life wearing masks, trying to hide what makes them human," said Lake. "Not Jaden. When

he's sad, he cries, when he's happy, he giggles, when he's nervous, he gets shaky. His innocence is what makes him beautiful."

A father and an advocate

Ever since he was elected as the Member of Parliament for Edmonton-Wetaskiwin in 2006, Lake has been a dedicated and powerful advocate for autistic children and their families. Lake says that when people think about autism, it's important to consider the multitude of hurdles families encounter across the lifespan. Like many conditions, early evidence-based intervention is key to unlocking potential.

But the challenges don't end there. Navigating the education system can be difficult and supports vary between jurisdictions. In many cases, schools can make accommodations for kids with autism to stay in the education system a few years longer. Jaden was in high school until his 21st birthday and had the opportunity to work in the school library.

But by far the biggest challenge facing families and caregivers of individuals with autism is: "What happens when we're gone?"

"Kids with autism turn into adults with

Mike Lake and his son Jaden presenting at the Canadian ASD Alliance (CASDA) Summit in Ottawa in March, 2015. (Photo courtesy of CASDA)



autism and have largely the same life expectancy that everyone else has," said Lake. "Who's going to be with them when we're no longer around?"

In order to make that unthinkable transition easier for autistic kids and their families, Lake believes that more needs to be done to put into place the proper societal structures to support individuals with autism.

In 2015, Lake helped launch the Canadian Autism Partnership. The vision behind the partnership was to establish a network of experts to advise governments in different jurisdictions on evidence-based policies. Early intervention, education, housing, vocation and transitions at different life points topped their list of priorities. The group of experts determined that in order to carry out their work, they would require a \$9 million investment over five years.

The current government has made mental health care a priority in its new health accord. Specific commitments to support Canadians with autism have not yet been announced. "Regardless of party, what we need to do to move the ball forward is to respectfully reach out to our elected officials and explain what

life is like and what this funding means to our families and our loved ones with autism," said Lake.

What's next?

Together, Lake and Jaden will continue to spread their message of hope. Jaden recently transitioned out of high school and is now enrolled in a program called "Quest for Independence" in Edmonton, where he is learning important life skills to prepare him for the future.

Meanwhile, Jaden continues to find new ways to overcome every day challenges. His journey as an advocate is just beginning. "Jaden regularly gives us new stories to share with people and it's pretty cool to have the platform we have to really meaningfully impact people's lives," said Lake. "It's been a blessing to be able to walk this journey with him."

Hayley Chazan is Inspirations' Ottawa bureau chief. A graduate of Carleton's Master of Journalism program, she currently works in communications for a national non-profit organization.



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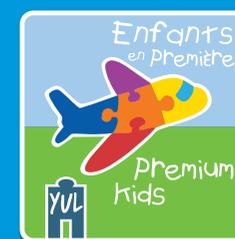


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AÉROPORTS DE MONTREAL



The Dynamic Funds Teachers of Inspiration: Honouring Team Yaldei

By Cindy Davis

When Risa Plotnick, director of School and Rehabilitative Services at the Donald Berman Yaldei Developmental Centre tried to decide which school teacher to nominate for the Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration award, she had trouble choosing – so she nominated them all! Plotnick felt that the teaching staff work so closely as a unit, it would be most fitting to nominate them as a group.

“It was hard to choose. So we nominated the entire teaching team from last year,” says Plotnick proudly. “We have a very passionate and dedicated staff that really tailor the program to suit each student’s needs. We also work closely with the parents because we want the skills taught to translate into the home. The transdisciplinary approach we use is very unique.”

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

The winning team includes last year’s core teaching team of Tina Haggarty, Rivky Hendel, Shauna May, Jennifer McLeod, Chaya Silber, Samantha Smith and head teacher, Sonja Washer. Plotnick notes that the assistant educators, therapists and support staff as well as new teachers on the team are all highly deserving of an award as well.

The Donald Berman Yaldei Developmental Centre also has a specialized school for children with mild to profound intellectual disabilities and autism, and runs from pre-k to secondary 1. The school, which used to be located on the 5th floor of the Queen Elizabeth Medical Centre, relocated last year to the former premises of JPPS at 5170 Van Horne in Côte-Des-Neiges. The move,

says Plotnick, has allowed the students and staff to feel more at home in a natural school environment, complete with a gym, a schoolyard and plenty of space and natural light.

The school’s transdisciplinary and collaborative approach to education enables each teacher to run their own classroom, while working closely together to develop individual education plans for each student in the school. The teachers also work closely to develop school programming based on the research and interests of the teachers, including a new dance program, and art therapy.

Sonja Washer is proud to be the head teacher of this dynamic team and says that the level of energy that the group brings to the table is what makes them

so effective, as well as how closely they function as a team and how genuinely they care about their students. “The way the teachers support each other is really what makes them so special,” says Washer. “Seeing a child walk for the first time and having the staff there to support the child is so special. For our students, even small accomplishments are huge milestones so really being able to witness those and share in those accomplishments is amazing.”

Plotnick recalls one particular student who was unable to walk and with whom the staff was working tirelessly for months in the hopes that she would gain some mobility. “All of a sudden, one day last year I was sitting in my office and I heard people screaming and

The Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration 2017 teaching team, with Rivky Hendel, Shauna May, Jennifer McLeod, Samantha Smith, Chaya Silber, Tina Haggarty, Sonja Washer, and Risa Plotnick, director of School and Rehabilitation Services. (Photo credit, Yaldei)



crying, and I thought ‘Oh my G-d something happened,’” says Plotnick. “I went out, and there she was, walking down the hallway, and the teachers were just crying tears of joy for this child.”

Washer notes that while the special education profession can be emotionally draining, the rewards are profound. “Some of these parents have been told that their child may never walk or talk (by other institutions). But the teachers, therapists and staff at Yaldei see it as though there are no limitations for these children. We’re creating opportunities for these children.”

With a 100 percent increase in enrolment in recent years, room for more in the new building, and having recently been granted the autism code by the ministry of Quebec enabling them to offer a curriculum for children on the autism spectrum, the hard working teachers at Yaldei look forward to changing the lives of many more families in the near future. Says Plotnick, “We have this belief that each child has an untapped potential and that our job is to unleash it.”

Yaldei offers a range of professional services including, occupational therapy, physiotherapy, speech therapy, Applied Behavioural Analysis, social groups, creative therapies and parent training which is an integral part of Yaldei’s programs. For information contact risap@yaldei.org.

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INSPIRATIONS

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Notebook

By Wendy Singer

On August 23, 2017, Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom in Westmount held a ceremony to inaugurate their new indoor access ramp. This project complements the outdoor ramp that they constructed in recent years. The ramp took four years to build, from inception to reality. According to **Stephen Yaffe**, past president and chair of the capital campaign, constructing the ramp required a considerable amount of planning, renovation work, and funding.

This project was made possible in part through the generosity of **Arlene Fels** and her late parents, **Sybil** and **Jack Fels**, as part of the Temple's capital campaign. Fels is a Montrealer who, since retiring, has devoted herself to helping others by giving back to organizations that she values and have made a difference in her life, including Agence Ometz, the Miriam Foundation, and the Mackay Rehabilitation Centre.

While unveiling a plaque commemorating Fels' donation, **Rabbi Lisa Grushcow**



Susan Greenberg, president, Arlene Fels, Rabbi Lisa Grushcow, and Denise Grossman, past president, at Temple Emanu-El Beth Sholom.
(Photo credit, Barbara Peisajovich)

expressed the importance of always making sure that you're doing the best possible job for yourself and your community. "In a sacred space like this Temple, it is important that we keep the bar high," said Grushcow, acknowledging Fels' generosity and the hard work of the Temple's Inclusion Committee. This project was also funded by the Government of Canada's Enabling Accessibility Fund.

Tony Frascchetti from McDonald's West Island, Lyne Charlebois, Gail and Frédéric Cassir, owners of six McDonald's restaurants, Jeremy Hampson, Pierre Frégeau, Natalie Chapman, Diane Gibb, and Liam Chapman.

(Photo credit, WIAIH)



The KIZMET Centre was the recipients of this year's annual McHappy Day at six West Island and Saint-Laurent McDonald's locations, all owned by **Gail** and **Frédéric Cassir**. One dollar from each Big Mac, Happy Meal, and hot McCafe beverage sold was donated to building KIZMET – the West Island's new non-profit family resource centre and community hub. Amazingly, McHappy Day raised \$51,297 for KIZMET.

With the WIAIH's (West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped) decades of expertise in helping vulnerable families, the KIZMET Centre will serve all West Island families and their babies, toddlers and preschoolers under the age of six. Planned services include infant stimulation, early literacy, parent-child drop-in, support groups and information sessions. By building the new KIZMET Centre, WIAIH will now be equipped to service all local families with young children.

Last year, Montreal artist and photographer **Solli Amihod** learnt about I Can Dream Theatre, and, like for most of us, it was love at first song. He donated paintings to their gala event, but knew that he was destined for a greater collaboration. Amihod invited the cast to explore their creativity further through visual arts. Five of the "Dreamers" accepted his offer, excited to try their hand at another art form.

Amihod mentored the budding artists in his studio from January to May. As their talents emerged, his admiration grew even deeper. On August 6, **Maxwell Po**, **Michelle Perron-Elgee**, **Alexis Gerin-Lajoie**, **Diego Noya**, and **Jasmine Gee-Silverman** exhibited over 30 abstract paintings at Gallery 5275 on Ferrier street in Montreal.

The experience was fulfilling for

Amihod, most particularly the profound connections he developed with his protégés. The feeling was mutual. As Gerin-Lajoie said, "I like being with Solli. He's an awesome guy." Po enjoyed the experience of painting: "It encourages and inspires me to express myself."



Maxwell Po, Jasmine Gee-Silverman, Solli Amihod, Michelle Perron-Elgee, Alexis Gerin-Lajoie at Gallery 5275. Missing from the photo is Diego Noya.
(Photo credit, Cathy McDevitt)

Guitar coach, musicologist, and founder of Sharing Music Unites Us™, **Artist JAYE** is sharing his deep love and talent for music with as many children

organizations. "We're giving students with challenges something to smile about while helping them develop key life skills through learning to play music," states JAYE.



Principal of Crestview Elementary School Aimee-Elizabeth Parsons, student Julian, and Artist JAYE after a performance at Crestview Elementary School.

On September 7, JAYE visited Crestview Elementary School of the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board in Laval. For one joyful hour, he entertained the students with his electric and acoustic guitars, played various forms of music and explored how music creates a mood. Students clapped and sang along. Principal of Crestview **Aimee-Elizabeth Parsons** was delighted to share this inclusive event with her students, and that all could participate at their own level.

On each community visit, JAYE donates one or more guitars and lessons to students. The lucky recipient at Crestview was Julian, an appropriate winner due to his love of music. "Music transforms people's lives for the better," shared JAYE. "Our students benefit enormously by playing an instrument." For information on how to bring Artist JAYE to your school, visit www.SharingMusicUnitesUs.com.

as humanly possible. When he was a young boy, JAYE picked up the guitar and realized that music helped him cope in difficult times. For the past five years, he has volunteered his time by performing at schools and community



Notebook

By Wendy Singer

After 21 years as Director of WIAIH, **Natalie Chapman** has retired. She was celebrated on October 2 at a retirement party at Chalet Arthur-Seguin in Pointe-Claire. Over 200 people attended this warm celebration, where parents and their children, WIAIH members, community leaders, board members, and local politicians, including **Mayor Morris Trudeau**, came together to celebrate Chapman's work. Both **Clifford Lincoln** and **MP Francis Scarpaleggia** shared words about Chapman, WIAIH, and their visionary project, KIZMET.

Singer **Lisa Walsh** and accompanist **Richard Bastien** entertained with renditions of *Fly Me to the Moon* and *Dream a Little Dream of Me*. Artist **Lena Baldoni** presented a portrait of Chapman as a retirement gift.

Chapman leaves WIAIH with a "tranquil mind" knowing that her successor **Lyne Charlebois**, past coordinator of the Pat Roberts Developmental Centre, will capably step into the role of director at WIAIH.

Marla Newhook, Natalie Chapman, and Lisa Walsh celebrate at Natalie's retirement party. (Photo credit, Tommy Bosa)



Spider-Man rappelled down a building in downtown Montreal on September 26 as part of the Société des enfants handicapés du Québec's Drop Zone fundraiser, which raises funds and awareness for disabled children in Quebec.

Spider-Man was not the only celebrity on hand. Local media stars including **Jason Rockman** from CHOM FM, and gold medal sprinter **Bruny Surin** raised funds and rappelled down the 23-story Industrielle Alliance building on McGill College Avenue.

Olympic gold medal skier **Alexandre Bilodeau** and his brother **Frédéric** in his wheelchair, were the real superheroes. They rappelled side-by-side, encouraging each other on the long way down. Comedian **Michael Lifshitz** also rappelled the high-rise in his wheelchair.



Brothers Frédéric and Alexandre Bilodeau rappelled down the Industrielle Alliance building.



Over 700 people came out to the Walk4Friendship in Old Montreal. (Photo credit, Rocha Photography)

On October 1, over 700 people participated in the Friendship Circle's Walk4Friendship at the Old Port. The organizations' biggest event was a huge success, with activities to entertain all, from face painting to a reptile zoo, circus acts, scooter racing and carnival games provided by Everblast Play Company, and of course, the walk. The Walk4Friendship raises funds and awareness for children with special needs, and promotes the power of inclusion and the value of a community coming together for the benefit of those in need. Together, over \$436,000 was raised. These funds will enhance the Friendship Circle's weekly and seasonal programs, and provide the opportunity for many more friendships to bloom for young people with special needs.

Chef On Call is a food concept for students, young professionals, and anyone who desires convenient, home-style fresh comfort food at an affordable price. "We understand how hard it is for people to find time to cook a meal in their busy lifestyles. That's where we come in. We make great food and we dedicate ourselves to exceptional customer service," says **Gabriel Malbogat**, one of Chef On Call's co-founders.

Each month, Montreal's gourmet food delivery service donates its charitable burger called "The Donator" to a different cause. For each burger sold, Chef On Call contributes two dollars to the cause of the month.

Chef On Call is teaming up with *Inspirations* this December. Mark your calendar - it's time to enjoy The Inspirations Burger! "We are thrilled to finish off the year strong with *Inspirations*," says Malbogat. "It's a burger that gives back and it's the least we can do for the community that has been so good to us over the past nine years."

This year alone, The Donator Burger has raised more than \$5,000 for local charities. Chef On Call looks forward to its continued work with the Montreal community.

To order The Donator, visit www.chefoncalldelivery.com, use the mobile app, order online, or call to order at (514) 844-2044. Make sure to ask what's on the Donator Burger as toppings change every month. Chef On Call delivers throughout downtown Montreal, reaching as far as Westmount, St. Henri, Old Montreal, the Plateau, Mile End, and most of NDG.

Thank you for your support, and awesome burgers, Chef On Call!



Enjoy an Inspirations Burger in December with Chef On Call!

The American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine (AACPDM) recently brought medical and research teams from around the world together in Montreal for their annual conference.

On September 16, AACPDM hosted a free community forum for family members, caregivers, and individuals with cerebral palsy and other childhood-onset disabilities. Attendees enjoyed an afternoon of networking, learning from an expert advocacy panel, and visiting with local vendors. New research and medical advances on cerebral palsy and other childhood-onset disabilities were exchanged with families.

Dr. Peter Rosenbaum, professor of Paediatrics at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada research chair in Childhood Disability and co-founder of the CanChild Centre for Childhood Disability Research engaged attendees with his presentation on the "F words": Fun, function, future, friends, fitness, and fam-



JoAnne Mosel and Dr. Peter Rosenbaum at the community forum at the The American Academy for Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine Conference in Montreal. (Photo credit, JoAnne Mosel)

ily. **Frank Gavin** of the Citizen Engagement Council at CHILD-BRIGHT presented on defining roles, the patient as case manager, and collaborative engagements between patients and researchers.



L'été des premières fois avec un enfant autiste

Par Emmanuelle Assor



L'auteure et son fils qui profitent d'une belle journée d'été.

Notre fils autiste aura bientôt huit ans. Huit ans déjà qu'on le regarde évoluer, grandir, trouver sa voie. Huit ans aussi que nous avons renoncé aux longs voyages, activités de groupe et sorties sociales. Un long chemin souvent ardu, parsemé de surprises et de découvertes.

Cet été, après de nombreux étés à ne rien faire par peur des crises terribles que la nouveauté provoque chez lui, nous avons décidé d'innover. Nous sommes allés au cinéma « normal », celui qui est pour tous, que l'on regarde dans le noir et en silence. Dès que les lumières se sont éteintes, mon fils a commencé à parler à voix haute. Puis il m'a demandé mon cellulaire pour regarder des vidéos, probablement pour se rassurer. Ensuite, les cris ont suivi puis les « chuuuuut » se sont mis à fuser de partout dans la salle. Nous sommes sortis en panique et lui avons alors donné deux choix: quitter les lieux (et ne pas voir le film Cars 3 qu'il voulait tant voir) ou revenir dans la salle en silence. Nous sommes retournés nous asseoir au dernier rang, et à ma grande stupéfaction, nous sommes restés jusqu'à la toute fin.

Échec ou succès? Tout est une question de perspective. À force d'éviter d'être en public avec un enfant qui crie ou pleure fort, nos vies sont devenues ennuyeuses. Impossible d'être spontanés car la spontanéité n'est pas le fort des autistes! Mais que faire devant tant de rigidité? Accepter des routines contraignantes alors que la vie est pleine d'imprévus?

Après trop de renoncements, j'ai décidé cet été de faire des nouvelles choses. Direction donc vers le parc aquatique de Jay Peak. Avec un enfant « neurotypique », cela signifie beaucoup de

préparatifs : pictogrammes et photos du lieu où nous irons avec un déroulement de la journée pour diminuer l'anxiété engendrée par trop de nouveauté. Une fois sur place, trouver ce qui l'intéresse le plus et le laisser découvrir le plaisir de faire quelque chose qu'il aime (autre que de regarder son iPad!).

Ce jour-là, il a passé son temps à se baigner dans une immense rivière à vagues sur une bouée gonflable avec l'un de nous deux, puis tout seul, comme un grand. La seule crise - que nous n'avons pu éviter - est souvent celle du départ, car il faut mettre un terme à toutes choses, même les plus excitantes.

Enfin, la plus belle expérience de l'été fut de louer un chalet avec une grande piscine. À la campagne, notre fils était détendu. Sa plus grande passion : nager, ce qu'il pouvait faire à sa guise. Le calme de la nature lui fait du bien comme la plage qu'il a découverte l'an dernier. L'eau semble avoir un effet bénéfique sur lui et sur la majorité des enfants ayant des troubles de développement et sur nous, si contents de le voir ainsi épanoui.

Après La Ronde, le parc aquatique de Saint-Sauveur et la luge au Mont Tremblant, je conclus que malgré les crises imprévisibles, le jeu en vaut la chandelle. Les apprentissages du quotidien se font ainsi en essayant de nouvelles choses, en étant frustré parfois et ravi d'autres fois. C'est sûr qu'il faut s'armer de patience, mais quel plaisir est plus grand que celui de voir son enfant heureux? Pour l'instant, je ne l'ai pas trouvé.



Le Support : une fondation pas comme les autres

Par Alain Mongrain

L'année 1988 revêt une importance particulière pour les personnes concernées par la déficience intellectuelle. Une fondation entièrement consacrée à cette cause est mise sur pied par l'Association du Québec pour l'intégration sociale (AQIS). Ainsi, la Fondation québécoise de la déficience intellectuelle (FQDI) voit le jour. Son nom deviendra Le Support – Fondation de la déficience intellectuelle en 2013. Elle opte pour la collecte de vêtements et d'articles usagés afin d'amasser des fonds, une idée originale doublée d'un souci de protection de l'environnement.

En quelques années seulement, la FQDI est en mesure d'aider son association-mère et plusieurs organismes oeuvrant auprès des personnes vivant avec une déficience intellectuelle. Pour les familles, pour les personnes vivant avec une DI, pour les organismes, les aides financières octroyées constituent un soutien inestimable. Du jamais vu dans bien des cas!

Vive l'inclusion et l'intégration!

Parent pauvre du système de santé et des services sociaux, la déficience intellectuelle ne fait pas l'objet d'un financement très important et très soutenu. Le fardeau repose sur les parents et les organismes leur venant en aide. La présence et le soutien de la Fondation Le Support vient donc permettre d'améliorer la quantité et la qualité des services offerts.

Les aides financières accordées par Le Support ont permis notamment :

- De promouvoir et de défendre les intérêts des personnes vivant avec une déficience intellectuelle;
- De faciliter la construction de logements adaptés, la rénovation ou

l'agrandissement d'édifices;

- De réaliser d'importants projets d'inclusion sociale;
- D'acheter des équipements spécialisés;
- D'installer des structures de jeux adaptés;
- De financer des activités de loisirs, de sports, de culture et des voyages éducatifs;
- De financer des camps de vacances, des centres d'intégration et des maisons de répit.

Depuis ses débuts, Le Support a remis 18 millions de dollars pour favoriser une meilleure qualité de vie, une meilleure inclusion et une meilleure intégration des personnes vivant avec une déficience intellectuelle partout au Québec.

Vers de nouveaux horizons

À l'aube de ses 30 ans, Le Support procède à un virage important pour assurer sa pérennité et lui permettre de mieux remplir sa mission sociale. Pour la première fois de son histoire, la Fondation organisera des activités philanthropiques afin d'amasser des dons en argent. Nous accroîtrons nos activités de communication afin de hausser notre visibilité et notre notoriété. La cause de la déficience intellectuelle mérite que l'on fasse tous les efforts pour bien la servir.

Pour plus de renseignements, visitez www.lesupport.ca.

Alain Mongrain est le directeur des communications, Le Support – Fondation de la déficience intellectuelle.



L'ÉTAPE : célébrons 40 ans au service des personnes en situation de handicap

Par Mickaël Dulin

C'est en présence de 80 invités que la direction de L'ÉTAPE a célébré à Montréal le 25 mai 2017 ses 40 ans d'existence au service de l'intégration des personnes en situation de handicap sur le marché du travail, lors d'un événement qui s'est tenu à l'Institut Raymond-Dewar.

Étaient présentes à l'événement, de nombreuses personnalités qui appuient l'organisme dont, entre autres : Hélène Laverdière, députée fédérale, Laurier-Ste-Marie; Michel Nadeau, président du CA de L'ÉTAPE; François Huard, directeur général de L'ÉTAPE; ainsi que de nombreux représentants des organismes, tels que Emploi-Québec Laval et Montréal, la commission scolaire de Montréal, la commission scolaire de Laval, le CIUSSS Est de l'île.

L'ÉTAPE a présenté lors de son 40^e anniversaire son nouveau logo. Le précédent datait de plusieurs années et la direction a décidé de profiter de cet événement afin de faire peau neuve et de dévoiler un concept plus actuel.

Le concept du logo est que le « E » en forme d'escalier représente les étapes, le cheminement qu'un chercheur d'emploi doit effectuer avant d'intégrer un emploi.

« Depuis maintenant 40 ans, L'ÉTAPE vise l'intégration professionnelle et le maintien en emploi des personnes en situation de handicap. Au cours des cinq dernières années, à nos bureaux de Montréal et Laval, 3 542 personnes ont eu recours à nos services pour de l'accompagnement vers l'emploi, le renouvellement d'un CIT ou pour un maintien à l'emploi. Ces données confirment l'importance de maintenir et de développer des services de haute qualité répondant aux besoins de cette clientèle », mentionne le



directeur général de L'ÉTAPE, M. François Huard.

À propos de L'ÉTAPE

Avec ses bureaux à Montréal et à Laval, l'organisme L'ÉTAPE, subventionné par Emploi-Québec, répond aux besoins des personnes en situation de handicap qui habitent l'île de Montréal et l'île de Laval, en offrant des services gratuits en matière d'employabilité. Leur intégration se fait dans différents domaines : administration et commerce, manufacturier, santé, sciences humaines et sociales, les nouvelles technologies, etc. Ces services sont offerts en français et en anglais, et pour les personnes sourdes ou malentendantes, l'organisme privilégie la langue des signes (LSQ/ASL).

Chaque année, plus de 700 personnes participent à nos activités. Plus de 75 pourcent de ces personnes développent leur employabilité et intègrent ainsi le marché du travail.

Mickaël Dulin est chef d'équipe chez L'ÉTAPE.



Les équipes de L'ÉTAPE de Montréal et de Laval. (Crédit photo : Louis-Charles Dumais)

Spina bifida : prévention d'abord!

Par Emmanuelle Assor

Lors de la vidéo-conférence organisée par la fondation OVO au printemps dernier, la nutritionniste Mylène Duplessis-Brochu nous a fait part de ses conseils et recommandations pour éviter des malformations du tube neural lors d'une future grossesse.

Première chose à savoir concernant le spina bifida : il s'agit d'une malformation des nerfs dans la colonne vertébrale (dont la conséquence la plus connue est le spina bifida) et ce risque de malformation arrive lors des premiers jours de grossesse. Selon Mylène, le manque d'acide folique joue un rôle prépondérant dans la survenue de cette problématique.

Mylène conseille donc à toutes les femmes en âge de concevoir de planifier leur grossesse en prenant des vitamines prénatales qui contiennent, entre autres, de l'acide folique. Mais où trouve-t-on de l'acide folique? Naturellement, il existe dans certains légumes verts (asperges, épinards, brocolis) et dans les légumineuses (lentilles, pois chiches, haricots) et on en retrouve aussi dans les oranges et les produits enrichis (farine blanche, pâtes blanches, farine de maïs). Cependant, 75 pourcent des femmes qui désirent avoir un enfant ne consomment pas assez d'acide folique par leur alimentation seule.

C'est pourquoi Santé Canada recommande de prendre des multivitamines prénatales en amont de la grossesse pour prévenir les carences et diminuer les risques de donner naissance à un bébé de petit poids. Lors de la grossesse, les femmes peuvent faire une transition vers des vitamines adaptées et il est fortement conseillé de consulter un médecin pour tout besoin particulier (par exemple, si vous êtes une femme qui fume beaucoup ou qui a longtemps fait des ré-

gimes; si vous ne mangez pas de viande ou peu de produits enrichis; si vous avez eu plusieurs fausses couches ou si dans la famille il y a des antécédents de malformations, de maladie céliaque, d'épilepsie, etc.).

Dans tous les cas, ne pas craindre de prendre de trop grandes doses d'acide folique car il est hydrosoluble et excrété par l'urètre. Par contre, il n'est pas recommandé de doubler la dose de supplément prénatal car certaines vitamines ne peuvent pas être prises en trop grande quantité (une surconsommation de vitamine A peut avoir des effets non bénéfiques).

Parler à votre médecin est le mot d'ordre! Vu qu'il est impossible de renverser une malformation : prévention et efforts en début de grossesse sont essentiels.

Enfin, il est évident que de développer de saines habitudes alimentaires, avant, pendant et après la grossesse est une bonne chose. Avoir une alimentation équilibrée, en suivant le guide canadien d'alimentation, est important. Dernier conseil (valable pour tous) : mieux vaut manger régulièrement des petits repas pour éviter la nausée et la fatigue. Une collation aux 3-4 heures aide à fournir des glucides et protéines et surtout d'attendre le prochain repas. Lorsqu'une femme est enceinte, elle devrait manger 2 fois mieux et non deux fois plus!

Pour plus de renseignements sur ce sujet, consultez le site de la Fondation OVO : www.cliniqueovo.com.

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





Autonomy Preparation Program (APP) equips students with tools to pursue productive lives

By Elaine Cohen

Just as former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton alluded to the African proverb "It takes a village to raise a child," teachers, Tanya Yankowsky and Carla Toffoli, at John Grant High School (JGHS) of the English Montreal School Board concur it takes a pedagogical team to launch a transitioning program that prepares students to lead productive, fulfilling lives.

Yankowsky and Toffoli's brainstorming sessions came to fruition recently with government approval of the Autonomy Preparation Program. APP is designed for special needs students, ages 18 to 21, and is offered at the EMSB's JGHS in Côte Saint-Luc and L.I.N.K.S. High School in Ahuntsic.

Between them, Yankowsky and Toffoli have chalked up 30 years teaching students in mainstream and special

education classes. "We have enjoyed teaching all age groups but with the 18 to 21-year-olds, it's gratifying to witness the change in maturation," Toffoli said.

Others on board are Anna Gualtieri, a teacher at L.I.N.K.S.; JGHS Career Advisor Sissi Séguet, who places students according to skills, ability and interests; and Work Oriented Training Pathway Consultant Travis Hall.

JGHS/L.I.N.K.S. Principal Angela Vaudry and Vice Principal Grace Fanelli praise the comprehensive program. Educators address topics such as health, sexuality, independent living and budgets. APP is tailored to meet individual student needs.

Yankowski and Toffoli co-taught the Job Orientation Program (JOP) for seven years prior to APP. Throughout the years,

Learning Centre (SLC) and long-time educator.

Schipper explains that there is no quick fix to addressing longstanding learning difficulties. It requires a great deal of patience. "We make sure that parents understand that it is a process, and all parties must work together to help their child reach their full potential."

When addressing the needs of a student, SLC takes a holistic approach to learning about the child's challenges, including the psychologist's report as well as reports from other health and educational professionals. By delving into the child's developmental, cognitive, and emotional history from infancy to the present, Schipper and his team elicit vital information. At this point, it could be decided that further testing is required in order to uncover the underlying reasons for the student's struggles in school.

Such further investigations including standardized academic tests in English, French, and math help determine a student's strengths and weaknesses, cognitive efficiency, phonological processing,

they staged transitioning fairs at various EMSB venues. They also maintained ties with students after they had transitioned into the community. Although they recall success stories and praise many aspects of JOP, they realized the need for improvement.

"We used JOP as a catalyst for APP," said Yankowsky, adding JOP's valued components have been updated for APP. "We had to propose APP to the Quebec Ministry of Education with the courses we had designed. Our students do not receive provincial high school leaving certificates. Therefore, we sought official government recognition and approval."

The program includes English language arts, French as a second language, mathematics, health and human development, transitioning towards indepen-

and visual/spatial abilities, among others. Once this process is complete, an appropriate and suitable plan can be recommended by specialists.

Schipper explains that there are a variety of program options offered at SLC: unique science-based brain training and remedial programs, as well as one-on-one academic support, all of which are delivered by specially trained teachers.

Fast ForWord addresses language, phonological, and auditory processing challenges, while Interactive Metronome is a motor-based program which enhances the student's cognitive efficiency by addressing the individual's attention, working memory, and processing speed. Cellfield, the third brain training program, addresses weaknesses in reading fluency, which can ultimately lead to greater comprehension. The remedial programs teach students the skills they have not mastered, such as reading, writing, and spelling in English and French as well as math. The one-on-one academic support program prepares students for assignments and tests. "So much of learning takes place in millisecond timing,"

dence and career development.

APP offers practical work experience. Students learn how to problem solve in real time and develop a pro-active attitude. They spend two days a week in a work environment. "We join them on-site, offer guidance and conduct an evaluation, along with their supervisors," Yankowsky said. "We meet with parents and community organizations and are always looking for pharmacies, department stores, food banks and other venues for student stages."



Ajeevan Ratnam assists in food service at EMSB head office cafeteria. (Photo credit, Carla Toffoli)

For information, visit www.emsb.qc.ca.



"My child has a psycho-educational assessment. What do I do now?"

By Elaine Cohen

Many parents consult a psychologist if they suspect that their child has a learning disability that impedes their progress in school. When they receive the psychologist's report, they turn to the school's professional staff for support.

"Schools are already doing all they can to support their students, but some children require additional help," says David Schipper, director of Strategic

Dara Goldsmith, one of two program directors at SLC, explains. "A strong sense of timing is crucial for information to be processed efficiently."

It is important to reassess students after certain milestones have been met, and goals are achieved. "Meetings with parents at regular intervals to review the student's test results and progress are essential," Goldsmith said. "When required, it is also important to contact the schools, psychologists, and other professionals interacting with the student."

"The foundation of learning is built by addressing the root causes of the student's learning challenges," added Schipper. "With the processing difficulties addressed, the student is newly ready for the learning that lies ahead."

For more information, call (514) 631-9745 or visit www.strategiclearning.ca.





Worktopia: Improving future employment prospects for youth with autism

By Rakhee Chowdhury

The road to finding meaningful employment in adulthood is hardly ever a smooth ride. For a person with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), navigating this road often results in unique challenges that can be particularly daunting. According to the Canadian Survey on Disability conducted in 2012, as many

as 83 percent of adult respondents with ASD report no employment income. It is no question that the right job can improve one's self worth and be something to look forward to. The question is: what can be done to help make the road to adulthood for young adults with ASD an easier one to navigate?

With the aim of creating vocational initiatives for individuals with ASD and/or intellectual disability, the See Things My Way (STMW) Centre for Innovation is participating in Worktopia, a national project sponsored by The Sinneave Family Foundation and Autism Speaks Canada, and funded in part by the Government of Canada's Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities Program. Worktopia programs emphasize community participation by helping youth with ASD develop the skills necessary to obtain sustainable employment.

The first Worktopia program offered in Quebec by the Centre is Employment-Works Canada (EWC): a 12-week training program that paves the road to future employment for young adults with ASD, aged 15 to 29, and no longer in school. Inaugurated in January 2017, EWC collaborated with a variety of workplace partners to provide eight adults with ASD opportunities to explore their interests in the areas of foodservice, TV production, and community services. Throughout these experiences, partici-



Participants and staff of the first cohort of Employment-Works Canada (Québec) at Action Main d'Oeuvre inc. (Photo credit, Audrey Morrissette)

pants felt more prepared than ever to transition toward future employment, having gained lasting friendships and a new set of skills under their belt. The journey continues as participants explore even more employment possibilities with the ongoing support of career counsellors at Action Main D'Oeuvre inc.

This fall, STMW is thrilled to launch another edition of EWC as well as the first edition of CommunityWorks Canada® (CWC). The latter is a 10-week after-school pre-employability program that aims to improve job readiness among students with ASD, aged 15 to 21, through volunteer opportunities. Soon, more youth with ASD will enroll in these programs to foster the development of important skills and to seek opportunities for future employment.

STMW is currently seeking youth with ASD, aged 15 to 29, to participate in the 2018 editions of Employment-Works Canada and CommunityWorks Canada®, both offered in English. To participate, contact Rakhee Chowdhury, Worktopia coordinator in Québec at rakheec@seethingsmyway.org. To learn more, visit <http://worktopia.ca/>, <http://www.seethingsmyway.org/>, and <http://www.actionmaindoeuvre.ca/>.



Get down to work: An exploratory study of employment among post-secondary graduates with disabilities

By Evelyne Marcil, Laura King, Alice Havel, Catherine Fichten, and Mary Jorgensen

After working hard in college and university for many years, most people assume they will obtain employment when their studies are completed. In the case of graduates with disabilities, finding a job is a major concern. As there are multiple barriers to employment for graduates with disabilities, we decided to investigate the job search process of successfully employed post-secondary graduates with disabilities.

We selected 16 English speaking participants from previous studies who told us that they had a job and interviewed them about their job search process. Sixteen short interviews (10 to 15 minutes) were conducted over the phone, email or Skype. Questions concerned the nature of employment, duration of the job search, how participants heard about the employment opportunity, strategies used to obtain employment, and advice they would give to a graduate with disabilities who is looking for a job.

Participants' jobs ranged from store manager to teacher, and from lawyer to translator. Although many participants had jobs related to their field of studies, some worked in a different field (i.e. studying in a pastoral ministry and working as a youth centre counselor). All 16 participants had obtained employment within 12 months of graduating. Nine participants did not even look for a job as they were hired where they had completed their internship or were already working when they finished their studies. In order of importance, participants learned about job opportunities through contacts, employment centers or job websites, volunteering, and other ways (i.e. already employed there). Regarding strategies to obtain employment, participants used, in order of importance:

contacts, skill set, volunteering, already working there, and other strategies, such as personal qualities, experience in the field, and a good resume.

Regarding advice participants would give to recent post-secondary graduates with disabilities looking for a job, their answers were divided in the four P's of employment. These were, in order of importance: Practical (i.e. work on CV, prepare for interview), Personal (i.e. accept yourself, do not give up), People (i.e. network, having someone to vouch for you is good), and Professional experience (i.e. volunteering, internship). It is noteworthy that some participants suggested disclosing a disability, whereas others advised against it.

The advice provided can be beneficial to everyone, not only graduates with disabilities. Advice such as "do not give up" or "prepare for interviews" is useful for anyone in search of a job. Thus, among post-secondary graduates with disabilities, strategies and advice to obtain employment do not differ from those for the general population. In terms of disclosing a disability, as a general recommendation, individuals should disclose only if: 1) their disability might impact their work performance, 2) there are benefits to disclosing (i.e. accommodations, quotas for employment) that outweigh potential pitfalls (i.e. discrimination, not getting the job), and 3) they are comfortable disclosing their disability. Other than that, the world is yours. Get down to work!

This research was conducted by the Adaptech Research Network at Dawson College.

For information, email Catherine at Fichten@adaptech.org





Tax tips to minimize your tax liability

By Harold Akerman

Donations paid in the calendar year

Donations in excess of \$200 qualify for higher tax credits. A donation can be non-cash (e.g. a car). It is important that the donation receipt reflect the market value of the item. Donating certain types of capital property (e.g. qualified investments - Canadian marketable securities) directly to a charity will avoid capital gains tax and is eligible for the donation tax credit. The year 2017 is the last year of the federal First-Time Donor's Super Credit (an additional 25 percent federal tax credit for donations up to \$1,000), subject to certain eligibility criteria.

RRSP

RRSP (Registered Retired Savings Plan) contributions reduce taxable income and the tax savings are based on your marginal tax rates. The federal tax assessment indicates your RRSP contribution room, unused RRSP contributions carried forward, and the repayment schedule of the Home Buyer's Plan. The contribution deadline is 60 days after December 31 of the current year, and contributions made in this time period can either be deducted in the previous tax year or in the year of the contribution. The higher income earner could contribute to a Spousal RRSP and claim the RRSP deduction. Subject to certain restrictions, when the spouse makes an RRSP withdrawal, the RRSP could be taxed at the lower spouse's marginal tax rate.

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Plan ahead to stay ahead

TFSA, RDSP, and RESP

TFSA (Tax-Free Savings Account), RDSP (Registered Disability Savings Plan), and RESP (Registered Education Savings Plan) are not direct tax savings, but should be included in your family overall wealth planning. To qualify for the RDSP, the person must be eligible for the Disability Tax Credit. The latter two plans have additional incentives in the form of government money. Ensure that you know how to maximize the government contributions.

Medical expenses

Medical expenses can be claimed for any 12-month period ending in the current tax year. Review your medical expenses, and calculate the 12-month period that totals the highest medical expense (i.e. March 2016 to February 2017). Medical expenses include employee's contributions to group medical plans (Rel 1 Box J), and travel medical insurance.

SPOUSAL LOANS

The higher income earner loans funds to their spouse and must pay the prescribed rate of interest. The borrower uses the funds to earn income and the tax savings is the difference of the spouses' marginal tax rates.

The filing deadline is April 30. If you or your spouse is self-employed, then the deadline is June 15.

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Make It Matter ready to fund educational initiatives

By Wendy Singer

Last spring, Inspirations and St. Gabriel Elementary School of the English Montreal School Board were the first organizations to receive funding from Make It Matter (MIM). It is now our turn to honour their work.

MIM is a new non-profit organization that funds project-specific initiatives that support quality education for all learners. How does this work? MIM invites educators, teachers, and community organizers in need of financial assistance to propose a project and apply for funding through their website. Acting as a liaison between the Montreal community and the classroom, the team aims to create a support system for administrators, educators, parents, and learners in order to enhance every student's educational experience.

MIM is the creation of **Olivia Sheehy-Gennarelli**, a recent graduate from Concordia University's School of Public Affairs and Policy Studies with a minor in First People's Studies and currently a Graduate student in the Community Economic Development program, and **Deborah Athanasopoulos**, who is currently teaching at an elementary school in New York City and earning her master's degree in education. Both of these impressive and energetic young women strongly believe in community engagement, philanthropy, and making every day at school the best day ever.

Organizations like MIM show us what happens when a group of young professionals with deep hearts and powerful minds pull their resources together to create change.

On May 6, 2017, the dynamic MIM team, including a sophisticated crew of volunteers, hosted their inaugural Funfair fundraiser at Kandy Art Gallery in Montreal. The venue was tastefully decorated to set the tone for a fun and exciting evening. There was candy galore, fabulous raffle prizes, a photo booth, a giant Twister board, an open bar, appe-

tizers and a dessert buffet, not to mention dance tunes by **DJMADJ**.

Funds given to St. Gabriel were allocated to their Home Reading Program and iPads for their SEEDS and Transition program classrooms that cater to students with behavioural and academic issues. At *Inspirations*, we are developing our outreach to the community. On January 25, we will host our first Make It Matter lecture: Transition Planning: When and how, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at the EMSB. And save April 14 for our Fun For All recreation fair! In addition, we have created the Make It Matter lecture tour and series, featuring engaging speakers who are experts in the field of special needs.

Two Make It Matter lectures took place at Elizabeth Ballantyne Elementary School (EB), organized by **Linda Mahler**, *Inspirations* coordinator of educational outreach, and Principal **Michael Brown**. **Isaac Hoch** from Disability Financial Assistance Corporation enlightened EB parents about government benefits that are available.

On EB's staff orientation day, child care workers, student teachers and teaching staff were treated to an inspirational presentation by **Steven Atme** about living with autism. His audience was moved when he explained how influential his teachers and parents were in making him the person he is today. Atme helped teachers realize just how much positive influence, and the life-changing impact, they can have on their students. Brown's words shared after Atme's presentation rang true and long: "Don't get furious, get curious."

To book a lecture with the Make It Matter lecture tour, email linda_mahler@hotmail.com. To apply for a grant, visit www.makeitmattertoday.org.



Make It Matter Founders Olivia Sheehy-Gennarelli and Deborah Athanasopoulos getting ready for the Funfair at Kandy Art Gallery.

(Photo credit, Adriana Luu Photography)



MIM guests hamming it up at the Funfair photo booth.

(Photo credit, Dana Conceptions Photography)



Linda Mahler, Wendy Singer, Deborah Athanasopoulos, Jim Daskilakis, Olivia Sheehy-Gennarelli, and Joanne Charron at the Make It Matter Funfair.

(Photo credit, Adriana Luu Photography)



Make It Matter volunteers Helen Chan and Jasmine Pham sell raffle tickets at the Funfair.

(Photo credit, Adriana Luu Photography)



DJMADJ has guests on their feet at the Funfair.

(Photo credit, Adriana Luu Photography)



Linda Mahler, Steven Atme, Michael Brown, and Kate Marien at the Make It Matter lecture on staff orientation day at Elizabeth Ballantyne Elementary School.





Teen living with SMA inspires others to stay positive, dream big

continued from cover page...

Vicky Stuhec, an occupational therapist at the Lester B. Pearson School Board, has been working with Sammy since he started kindergarten at Margaret Manson Elementary School in Kirkland. She refers to her time spent with him as a “privilege.” Last school year, she proudly watched Sammy accept his high school diploma surrounded by classmates and friends at John Rennie’s graduation ceremony.

Over the last 12 years, she and a team of specialists worked together to make Sammy’s mainstream school integration a success. “I remember buying him his first pair of scissors – adapted scissors,” reminisces Vicky. “At the time, Sammy had the use of his right arm. Now he’s down to just his right hand, from the wrist down.”

Integration aids helped Sammy get his work done in class and during exams.

“It’s changed over the years. Initially there were a lot of people writing or scribing for him,” explains Vicky. “We then turned to a more technological approach – people typing for him. All his science notes were on Google drive. He has his iPod Touch which has a remote mouse app that allows him to access and make a laptop function for him.” Sammy can speak well, but his speech is not always loud or articulate enough to be able to use speech-to-text technology.

“Full integration ... benefits the child and I think it’s an amazing learning experience for all the peers and the staff. It changes people’s perspective of any physical disability,” says Vicky. “On the other hand, I totally understand and respect parents who prefer not to have their child integrated. As a parent you need to make a decision that’s going to be right for you and your child.”

Integration was the best choice for Sammy and his family. “John Rennie was a great experience. [I] made friends and did very well in my classes,” Sammy says.

His parents and older sister are proud of everything Sammy has accomplished, but his mom acknowledges his recent graduation was bittersweet. “They were all amazing there with Sammy and myself. We will miss the resource team.”

Rosa is confident her son will have a bright future since new treatments for SMA should soon be available in Canada. Until then, the family will continue to raise funds for SMA research with their annual Valentine’s Day gala. “We worked hard to keep him healthy and happy,” says his mom. “I hope Sammy continues to be the sweet, positive person that he is.”



*Sammy Cavallaro at his graduation ceremony.
(Photo credit, Cavallaro family)*

Mental fitness tip: Listen!

*By Janet Perlis, M.Ed. and
Despina Vassiliou, Ph.D.*

When our children are young, we as parents, seek to find solutions to their problems. They are hungry and we feed them. Their diaper is dirty and we change it. They have a misunderstanding with a playmate or sibling and we help them clear it up. It becomes second nature to us. We listen to them when they speak but we often do so to try and find solutions when something upsets or frustrates them. The purpose of listening is to allow them the space to express themselves in a safe space without judgment. This is a time for parents to speak as little as possible while children express themselves. Sometimes, when we offer solutions before they are ready to listen, we can shut down communication. We empower our children when they come up with the solutions themselves.

Tips on how to listen:

- Choose a time and place when there will be limited interruptions or distractions (e.g., shut down devices or television)
- Going for a walk or a drive together is more naturally conducive to a conversation
- Food can always promote conversations (e.g., have a hot chocolate together or go for ice cream)
- Find things you like to do together. Connecting through less conversation and directed activities can help promote long term communication (e.g., draw together, go biking together, go to the park, listen to music)
- Create a comfortable physical environment. You may cuddle together under a blanket on a comfy couch, or dim the lights
- Parents should speak the least, and ensure your child takes the lead in the conversation
- Using phrases like “tell me about...” can help your child open up instead of direct questions (who, why) that can be misconstrued as intrusive
- Reserve judgment and avoid making suggestions, blaming or shaming. Judgment and blame can hinder communication quickly
- Use language and terms your child will understand or use
- Keep the conversation confidential. Sharing with grandparents or friends can sever the trust your child has in you

SOMETIMES WE NEED SOMEONE TO SIMPLY BE THERE ... NOT TO FIX ANYTHING OR DO ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR BUT JUST TO LET US FEEL WE ARE SUPPORTED AND CARED ABOUT ♥



(Photo source, Internet)

Overall, make this time enjoyable for both of you. A little time everyday devoted to simply listening to your child is an investment in your future relationship with them.

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



A fresh perspective: Special needs as a family affair

By Jay Jones-Doyle

Framing, simply defined, is the way in which you choose to look at something – and often what impact you allow it to have on your life. You know the old “the glass is half full or half empty” question... same deal, just applied to everything.

Positive framing is especially important when a disability is in the equation. It is my opinion that too often we hear about a “family with a special needs child”. This framing singles out the special needs child as being the “different” aspect of the equation. It not only serves as a really poor starting point for fostering the child’s sense of normalcy, it also sets the stage for feelings of being burdened by the disabled individual’s needs – which can lead to resentment.

I have recently had the pleasure of working with Carter Bourassa, sous-chef at Hopkins Restaurant on Monkland Avenue in Notre-Dame-de-

Grâce. Carter’s brother, Jonathan (Jon), has cerebral palsy and their family has taken an extremely healthy approach to the situation. I spoke to Susan, a retired nurse and Carter and Jon’s mother, about the foundational framing of their family and how it impacts everything that stems from it. “We (Carter, Jon, Brianna, Mike, and I) are a special needs family of which our son Jonathan is a part. Together we celebrate the things that make him unique and appreciate the struggles he faces in all aspects of his life,” shared Susan. “We also work hard to make his life great. It has made us a whole unit, and each of us better and stronger. It has made us appreciate life and all its diversities, to avoid individual burnout. We feel honoured to be part of Jon’s life, thrilled that he survived and continues to thrive because of his family. Jon is who he is and is happy to be who he is because of all of us. And if one of us was tired or unable... someone else in the family would pick up the mantle of care. Our glass is always half full - never half empty. It is all perspective.”

Susan has sought out the many resourc-

es available to her family through the CLSC. “I am not afraid to ask anything. And generally, whatever I ask has been met with consideration... I rarely get a “No”. Often parents feel like a failure and feel unworthy by asking for help. There is no stigma in asking for help.”

I am a firm believer in framing life events in a positive light, and in proactively seeking resources or opportunities that will make your life easier or more enjoyable. I am proud to know people like Carter, Jon, and their mother Susan – their core family values are second to none and truly a source of inspiration.

Jay Jones-Doyle is the co-founder and vice-president of Product Development at Legal Lighthouse Inc, and the president of Confidence Driven Coaching, the chief financial officer of the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, and worked with the UN’s Business and Biodiversity program. He holds two advanced degrees and was named one of Quebec’s top three graduate students of 2011 and Concordia’s Outstanding Student of the Year. He sits



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on the Board of Directors of the Concordia University Alumni Association, is a motivational speaker, a championship-winning junior hockey coach, has cerebral palsy, and is the proud father of a 13-year old son.



Special kids of Montreal share the love on Facebook

By Caroline Sugar Miller

I was born with holes in my heart and in my aorta, the blood vessel that goes from the heart to the brain. I was in the hospital for the first five months of my life, and the first two months were spent on a respirator. On my second day of life, the doctors opened up my chest and fixed the holes. Later, I developed an infection in my chest wound and now have a bad scar.

In my 23 years, I’ve had 11 operations, including one to make a flap at the back of my throat so that I can push air out my mouth and talk, and I have a pace-maker. On my sixth birthday, I blew out my birthday candles for the first time. I

didn’t get enough oxygen during open heart surgery, which caused me to have a stroke. That left me with some damage. I couldn’t use my right hand very well, and eventually, I learned to write with my left one.

When I was younger, I went to Summit School. When I completed that, I moved on to another school, but I was bullied, so eventually left. I began to work at MADA Community Centre, and I knew it was the place for me. I love my job! MADA helps people in need with the basic necessities of life while preserving their dignity and helping them become self-sufficient. I’ve taken on many tasks,

including working in the clothing store organizing the items to be given away, assisting clients, working in the food bank, and with the main receptionist. MADA feels like a family. It’s the second best thing that’s happened to me.

The best that’s happened to me is falling in love with the most amazing guy in the world, I was not expecting to meet him. I knew he was the one for me when I told him my story, of the dozen operations and the scar on my chest, and he said, “I don’t care. You’re beautiful just the way you are! Will you be my girlfriend?” I said absolutely, I will! And then he stole my heart.



Caroline Sugar Miller.

In order to bring other special kids together, Caroline started a Facebook group called Special Kids of Montreal. Join her at SpecialKidsOfMontreal.





Breaking isolation, one hearing aid at a time

By Randy Pinsky

Have you ever witnessed the joy expressed by a senior citizen receiving a hearing aid? Now just imagine the transformative potential for children in lower income countries, breaking their isolation and opening up a world of possibility. This is what the Montreal-based organization World Wide Hearing (WWH) strives to do, seeking out “hearing loss hotspots” where audiologists are rare and hearing aids, beyond reach. WWH initiatives include spearheading intervention, raising awareness and encouraging local empowerment.



A child is screened for hearing loss in Guatemala in 2015. (Photo credit, World Wide Hearing)

While most cases of hearing loss in the Western world are linked to genetic predisposition, those in the disproportionately affected low to middle income countries are due to a lack of basic health care and environmental conditions. From measles to chronic ear infections, communities are ill-equipped to handle the challenges, often resulting in stigmatization and rejection of those affected.

WWH sets out to “make hearing matter” through information campaigns, early intervention and hearing aid provision, as well as advocacy for those with minimal hearing.

But why this passion for what hearing aid provider Audicus calls “one of the world’s most prevalent health concerns”? Unlocking the key to silence through hearing aids and sensitization is central to individuals becoming contributing members of their communities. With a focus on innovation and sustainability, WWH encourages local involvement by facilitating peer support groups, ongoing trainings, and regular check-ins in order to ensure change is lasting and meaningful.

Executive Director Audra Renyi, recipient of the Young International Leader of Quebec Award (2013), Wharton Top 40 Under 40 (2015), and the Governor General of Canada’s Innovation Award (2017), is determined to “transform the way hearing care is delivered” through simplified mobile diagnostic kits, ideal for reaching remote communities.

With projects ranging from screening campaigns in the Philippines to partnerships with universities in Peru, WWH recently won the Google Impact Challenge grant (disability division). In typical proactive style, WWH will use these funds to address the prevailing gap in hard data and create an open-access global hearing database. As a leader in hearing care innovation, it has been invited by the World Health Organization to create the official collection app for the forthcoming hearing loss prevalence study.

A recent undertaking was a long-term “outcomes-based impact study” in Guatemala, chosen because there is only one audiologist in the entire country. Through surveying individuals on rankings of mental health and quality of life, WWH was overwhelmed by reports of confidence and better enjoyment of life - even “feeling safer” - after being fitted with hearing aids.

Aboriginal children and disability: A triple challenge in accessing care

By Randy Pinsky

McGill University’s Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism hosted a panel on the topic of “Indigenous children and disability” as part of their Disability and Human Rights Initiative. Speakers discussed the “triple” challenge this cohort faces in accessing health and social services which may hamper their ability to “fully participate in cultural and family life”.

Sharing stories from their work in child advocacy and community health, the speakers discussed the difficulties Aboriginal families face in accessing services available to most Canadians. Luna Vives, postdoctoral fellow at the McGill Centre for Research on Children and Families, described the Centre’s collaborative work with Manitoba’s Pinaymootang First Nations community in accurately appraising the situation.

Disparities in access to medical, allied health and additional care services (such as medical transport and respite) have resulted in significant delays and disruptions for those living on the reserves, negatively impacting their ability to survive and thrive. Caregivers subsequently feel overwhelmed and under-supported, which can challenge their ability to effectively parent. Many are faced with the predicament of remaining in the community with few services, or uprooting in search of health amenities.

While there have been some advances in care and respite, families must contend with the foreboding knowledge that such initiatives are but short-lived and grant-dependent. Temporary relief and support programs will unfortunately not meaningfully resolve the underlying issue of inequitable access.

Dr. Vandna Sinha from McGill’s School of Social Work discussed “Jordan’s Principle” which advocates for Aboriginal children to have the same access to essential services as their non-Indigenous counterparts. Named in memory of young Jordan Rivers Anderson from Manitoba’s Cree Nation, the principle is intended to “ensure equal healthcare for Indigenous children”. The issue was brought before the Canadian Human Rights Tribunal in 2016, reprimanding government departments for squabbling over who should finance his medical needs instead of contributing to his recovery.

As stated by Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN) National News, it is hoped that moving forward, priority will be to “care for the child first and fight over who pays later” so that such tragedies are not repeated. In order for change to be both meaningful and sustainable, government actors must actively consult with Aboriginal communities so that all voices are heard and Jordan’s memory, honored.



WWH strives to reinforce that “better hearing benefits everyone”. They maintain, “by addressing hearing loss, we can promote better health, greater educational attainment, and higher levels of economic productivity” - in essence, creating a true scenario of “hear” today, success tomorrow.

For information, contact World Wide Hearing at (514) 285-0990 or visit www.wwhearing.org.

Randy Pinsky is an assistant writer and office manager at TrueSelf Psychology.





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Accessibility for all abilities at the ADATH

By Elaine Cohen

An empowering Bar Mitzvah in 2002 resonated with congregants and paved the way for the ADATH Inclusion Program at the modern Orthodox synagogue in Hampstead. The well-honed inclusive program welcomes and embraces individuals of all abilities in the entire religious and secular community.

Alluding to the awesome spiritual experience, Rabbi Michael Whitman recalled the lasting impression made by the Bar Mitzvah celebrant with physical and intellectual challenges. The ADATH espouses Judaism for the next generation and the congregation has always strived to be inclusive. However, it became a sustained effort with the formation of the ADATH Inclusion Task Force in February 2017. The following mission statement appears on all synagogue news releases: "The ADATH is welcoming and accessible to every person."

Members removed barriers to the building at 223 Harrow Crescent, making effective improvements. Canadian Paralympic boccia champion Alison Levine and congregant Dale Szlamkowitz surveyed the building and provided suggestions. The Task Force identified short-term, medium-term, and long-term goals. Rabbi Whitman commended progress thus far, noting achievement of many aspects of building access and other short-term goals.

"The way we serve the Jewish community is by being open to the world," Rabbi Whitman said, adding we all have strengths and weaknesses. "Everyone is created in God's image and must be respected." The ADATH has held various programs, such as a Yachad Shabbaton for young people with special needs. A poignant film presentation of *My Hero Brother* also enlightened congregants on the topic.

Rachel Desjourdy, a community inclusion specialist, sensitized the congregation with her inspiring Shabbat address. Levine and Canadian Spe-

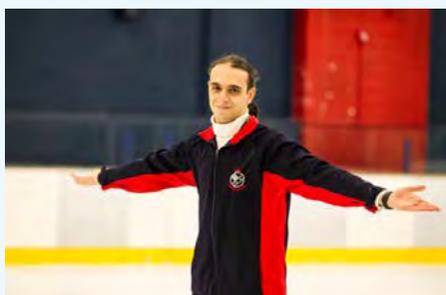


Figure skater Emile Baz, 25, from Saint-Laurent, spoke on Shabbat at The ADATH. (Photo source, Internet)

cial Olympics figure skating champion Emile Baz also have shared personal stories with Shabbat congregants. Baz recently brought home another gold medal at the 2017 Special Olympics Winter World Games in Austria and Canadian games in Newfoundland. Levine, a powerhouse athlete uses a wheelchair and Baz has autism. Another innovation is the ADATH work program. The Task Force entered into an agreement with Summit School using the ADATH as a location for their program. Last spring a student at the school began her stage working on various projects in the synagogue office. "The lay leadership of the ADATH, under President Peter Safran, has been very supportive of all these efforts," Rabbi Whitman enthused.

These efforts are appreciated by the community. He was selected by the Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA as rabbi at a camp devoted to children with special needs and their families. The four-day camp in August is held at the YCC campsite in the Laurentians.

The ADATH implemented an inclusive Shabbat program. In addition to Saturday morning services, people of all ages and abilities are invited to enjoy the Kiddush and socializing until 2:00 p.m.

Volunteers are needed to accompany participants with special needs to and from the synagogue. For details, contact Rabbi Whitman at rabbi@adath.ca.



LBPSB students with special needs take action through entrepreneurship

By Nancy Battet

Renowned Google educator Jaime Casap said, "Don't ask students what they want to be when they grow up, ask them what problem they want to solve." This philosophy has been adopted by the Lester B. Pearson School Board, which has incorporated the concept of developing an entrepreneurial spirit into their strategic plan. The school board is proud of the innovative entrepreneurship projects created each year by students from kindergarten to the adult sector.

The goal of an entrepreneurial project is for students to identify a need within their school, community or globally and take action by creating a product, service or event to address this problem. The project must benefit people, and place students in the heart of the action, allowing them to participate actively in the decisions and tasks required to carry out all steps of the project.

Every year, students across the province take part in the Quebec Entrepreneurship Contest. LBPSB schools enter a variety of projects under the category of Special Needs/Adaptation. This program fosters an entrepreneurial spirit and allows students to develop lifelong skills such as problem solving, critical thinking, collaboration and creativity.

Students with special needs at Lakeside Academy High School in Lachine created useful outdoor clothing accessories. The "snoody", a hat and scarf all in one made by the knitting club, warms up classmates who don't have hats and scarves to wear on cold winter days. The "mug glove" makes it easier to hold a hot beverage outdoors in winter. This knitted glove won first prize at the regional level of the Quebec Entrepreneurship contest.

Another winning project at the regional level was MacDonald High School's Nature Club. Students with special needs involved in this took action to help the environment, eco-system and wildlife in and around their school community. Students gained valuable hands-on skills growing milkweed for butterflies, feeding birds, and learning

ways to help and protect local wildlife. The entire school community benefits from the Nature Club, while these innovative students develop skills to become compassionate leaders, global thinkers and problem solvers. Diane Blackburn, Macdonald High integration aide, and Ms. Cavauiolo, librarian, see that when students have the opportunity to combine arts, hands-on activities and the love of nature, their self-esteem and sense of belonging improve and shine through.



The Macdonald High School Nature Club. (Photo credit, Diane Blackburn)

When students work together they feel a great sense of accomplishment.

Mary Rutherford, community and spiritual care animator with the LBPSB works closely with many students with special needs and oversees their projects. "One of the more magical aspects of the entrepreneurial program is that it often provides adults in the school the opportunity to see a student with a totally new perspective. Instead of seeing what the student can't do, they see a student being celebrated for what they can do," shares Rutherford.

For information on the Quebec Entrepreneurship contest, visit <https://www.osentreprendre.quebec/en/>

Nancy Battet is the community partnership liaison for the Pearson Partnership Program at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.





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Canada Shriners Hospital patients on tour: Encourage students to #CutTheBull

By Caroline Phaneuf

Nia, 12, is hemiplegic: she is completely paralyzed on the right side of her body. Jeffrey, 18, was born without a right hand or right foot. Saoud, 15, has spina bifida: he was born with an incomplete spinal cord. All three are patients at Shriners Hospitals for Children® – Canada. Because of their differences, all three faced years of bullying. Canada Shriners Hospital joined the fight against bullying with its #CutTheBull campaign because Nia, Jeffrey and Saoud are far from alone. Children with visible scars or disabilities are twice as likely to be bullied, meaning many of the hospital's patients face this difficult issue.

Jeffrey, Nia and Saoud have decided to stand up and share their stories, hoping their experiences can help eradicate bullying. All three are touring schools this fall and next winter/spring talking to students about their life with a disability, their bullying experience and how they overcame it.

Jeffrey's bullying lasted from Grade 1 to Grade 9. Kids began by calling him names, but in Grade 7, it turned physical. He was beaten up by a group of boys, who threw rocks and food at him. Jeffrey turned to his friends and parents, as well as his school's principal and psychologist. "I blamed myself for a long time," Jeffrey admits. "But I realized that I don't have to change for these bullies. They should learn to accept me. I now know that if I can overcome bullying, I can overcome anything."

At 12, Nia has already overcome six years of bullying. As of kindergarten, kids would repeatedly say mean things about her disability, telling her she wouldn't become anything in life. Nia would go home and cry every day. She didn't want to go to school. She turned towards her parents and switched schools twice. She

just began high school this year and is now confident she's done with the bullying.

Saoud faced bullying in Grade six, but his school's quick action put an abrupt stop to it. In the school yard, boys would run away from him and yell things like "catch us if you can, Saoud", knowing full well that with one leg amputated and arm crutches, he couldn't catch them. After speaking to his parents, Saoud confided in a teacher. She immediately gave the bullies detentions and advised their parents. The bullying never happened again.



Jeffrey, Canada Shriners Hospital patient, is speaking out against bullying. (Photo credit, Shriners Hospitals for Children® – Canada)

If you'd like Nia, Jeffrey or Saoud to speak at your school, contact Caroline Phaneuf at (514) 778-5092 or cphaneuf@shrinenet.org.



Project raises awareness of risk factors that contribute to poverty

By Ella Jegher

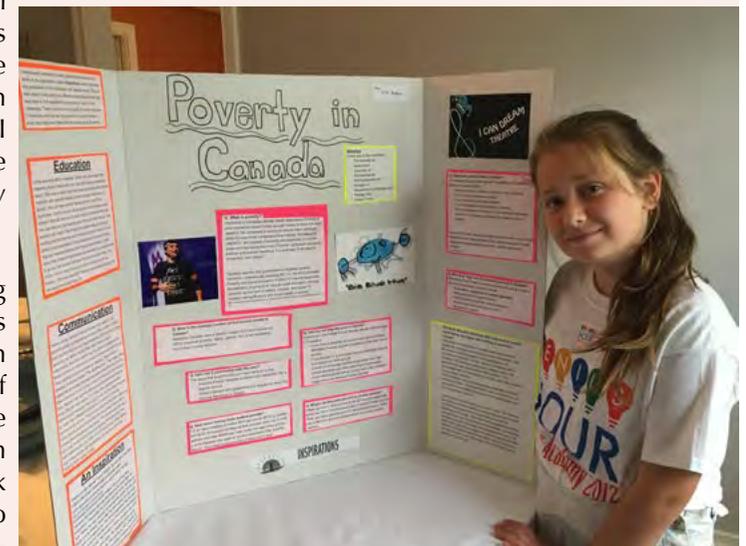
I am a Grade 5 student at Hebrew Academy. As part of my English class, I completed a project called Genius Hour. The goal of this project was for me to pick any topic that interested me, research it and learn more about it. I've always been concerned about poor people and would like to help them out. As a family, we always make an effort to offer support to the less fortunate (sometimes my mom buys Tim Hortons gift cards for people asking for money on the street), and so I decided to explore the topic of poverty in Canada.

While conducting my research, I was surprised to learn that the subject of poverty is a lot more complicated than it seems. Many risk factors contribute to individuals and families remaining poor in Canada. One factor is that individuals with mental health problems or intellectual disabilities are considered at high risk of living in poverty.

To better understand these risk factors, I interviewed Linda Mahler, coordinator of educational outreach at Inspirations. She helped me understand that the special needs community works extremely hard to fight the risk factors of ending up in poverty. Some of the stories she shared with me include Luca Patuelli, a dancer with his own company that lives by the motto of "No Excuses, No Limits." Another is that of the I Can Dream Theatre. Three individuals created a theatre company to give people with disabilities the chance to perform and learn from their experiences. One of my favourite stories is of The Big Blue Hug, created by a dad to help raise awareness

about autism and his son's journey with it. My mom bought one of their stunning pieces of art, so I will always remember this one.

I was inspired by the stories of individuals with disabilities and their families, friends and teachers coming together to help make a difference with the goal of creating a more inclusive society. In or-



Ella Jegher displaying her Poverty in Canada project poster at Hebrew Academy. (Photo credit, Hebrew Academy)

der to help eliminate poverty, we need to look at it in a much more complex way. I now understand that helping the poor is more complicated than giving charity or helping in a soup kitchen. We need to create a society that is more inclusive in education and job opportunities for those with disabilities. All children deserve the opportunity to succeed.

Some questions to think about: Does your school have children with disabilities? When you go shopping do you see individuals with special needs working? If your answer is no then what can we do about it? How can you help make a change in your community?





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Technology Feature



Freedom through technology

By Joanne Charron

Technology is amazing when it works for the betterment of the human condition, especially when it can augment a person's independence and accessibility. From speech to virtual reality, to adjusting your own artificial limbs, whether navigating with your head, eye gaze or any type of adaptation, there are a myriad of applications and adaptations that can be accessed through the tech world.

Without technology, strides to independence could not be achieved. As it progresses, it changes our lives. The freedom it provides the user is profound. The reduction of frustration is enormous.

Although it has been a learning curve for me, my experience with technology

has been life changing, and leaves me awestruck every time I see it in action. Imagine sitting in silence not being able to communicate or express your simplest of needs, pains, thoughts, wishes, dreams....to watch someone struggle to tell you something, anything, to know that they are "in there".

This is a feeling my son and I know all too well. He is non-verbal and could only make sounds, so we made our own vocabulary by attaching meaning to these sounds. The problem with our system was that it was limited. Only myself and those close to him could understand our language, so if we were not around to interpret, no one would understand him. Then we used pictures, but my son couldn't point to them because he is

quadriplegic. We kept trying new ways. They would work for a while but once again, they were limiting.

We were then introduced to an augmentative communication device. Although I had to advocate really hard to get him one through professionals and from the government, and I mean REALLY hard, they finally approved it. That is when everything changed!

My son was trained on his device, and took off with it. He surpassed the professionals' expectations, and his peers who were already using the device years before him. He began expressing his feelings, his discomforts, have conversations about his day, even tell jokes or tell you off! His frustration level completely diminished. No more guessing or charades to understand what he was trying to tell us. Now he never stops talking!

Until this day I will never forget the first words I heard my son speak through his communication device, and they were: "I LOVE YOU MOM."



Double trouble with brothers Nikitas and Niko in Greece.

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



Accessible digital libraries close the reading gap

By Annette MacIntyre

Many children and teens struggle to read due to a condition called print disability. The cause may be physical or visual in nature, or, more often, learning-based.

A learning-based print disability, such as dyslexia, has a direct impact on reading comprehension and can be identified by a qualified professional (such as a resource teacher, psychologist, or speech language pathologist with an expertise in understanding and assessing reading development) who can provide appropriate interventions and remediation.

Providing students with alternate format materials, such as audio, Braille, and e-books with text-to-speech technology, can benefit students enormously. Assisted reading can break the cycle of disengagement from text and boost their overall understanding of what's being taught. It helps students bypass their barrier, and keep up to pace with their peers.

The Centre for Equitable Library Access (CELA) provides Canadians who have identified print disabilities with access to the CELA library and its USA counterpart, Bookshare. These libraries offer

thousands of alternate format books for all ages and interests, including popular titles and bestsellers in English and French. All books are free and can be accessed on computers and mobile devices using free apps.

Individuals need to obtain an attestation of print disability from a qualified professional (as listed in paragraph two of this article), and then sign-up for service with the Service Québécois du livre adapté (SQLA), a branch of the Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec (BANQ). A student's family can initiate registration on his or her behalf. (<http://www.banq.qc.ca/sqla/abonnements>). From there, members can register for CELA and Bookshare.

CELA also offers an Educator Access Program for teachers who support students with print disabilities. The Accessible Reading Quebec Project, a 2016-17 initiative of the Advancing Learning

in Differentiation and Inclusion (ALDI) project and the Direction des services à la communauté anglophone (DSCA), developed a process for Quebec school boards to use the Educator Access Program. Several boards, including the English Montreal and the Lester B. Pearson School Boards, are working with pilot schools during the 2017-18 school year to bring CELA and Bookshare services to their students.

For information about the Educator Access Program in Quebec, and individual memberships, visit <https://accessiblereading.com/accessible-library-memberships>.

Annette MacIntyre is a librarian with Educational and Technology Services at the English Montreal School Board. Annette can be reached at amacintyre@emsb.qc.ca.





Resource Page

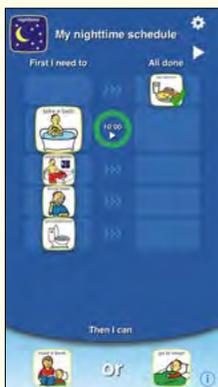
Apps to support students at home and at school

Compiled by Wendy Singer

We asked Andrea Prupas, assistive technology consultant at the English Montreal School Board, to share three effective apps (low-cost or free) on different platforms with *Inspirations* readers. Here's what she recommends.

ChoiceWorks (for iOS)

Recommended for: Visual scheduling, choice-making with visuals or social stories <http://apple.co/21aiGf7>



Research has demonstrated that many students with autism spectrum disorder can benefit from the use of visuals for communication, language and social interaction. ChoiceWorks is a social support app for helping children complete daily routines with visual schedules as well as understand and manage their feelings. Created with child development specialists, it is designed for caregivers to provide clear and consistent support to

foster a child's independence, positive behaviour, and emotional regulation at home and in the community. It can also be used by teachers in a school setting.

The best part about Choiceworks is the ability to highly customize the app to a student's needs. Key features include: Visual scheduling, waiting, and feelings boards; an image library preloaded with over 180 images and audio; the ability to add your own images, video and record your own audio; the ability to create profiles to personalize and manage multiple users (for teachers); and more.

Mindmeister (for Google Chrome)

Recommended for: Mind mapping <http://bit.ly/2fZ9NoK>

Mind mapping can be effective for many students as a pre-writing strategy as it allows students to demonstrate their thoughts in a visual format. Visual thinking prior to writing can allow students to better demonstrate, organize and then reflect on their ideas.

MindMeister is a mind mapping tool integrated into Google Docs (a free web-based Google application that students can use for word processing). This means that a student can create a mind map directly within their document at the beginning of the writing process or even throughout the writing process. For teachers using G-Suite for Education in their classrooms, a nice feature of Mindmeister is that students can collaborate on a mind map together!

Microsoft Office Lens (for Office 365, Android and iOS)

Recommended for: Scanning text documents <http://bit.ly/2x4r9qc>

A big dilemma for teachers and students is making paper-based text (such as assignments, texts, pages of a book) into an accessible format. Making a document accessible means that, after scanning, it can be read with a text-to-speech tool like WordQ, Natural Reader or your device's free text-to-speech tool. However, scanning documents into this format is not always easy to do.

Office Lens is like having a mini scanner in your pocket. With optical character recognition technology (OCR), it turns your picture into a document that is accessible. Office Lens also has a built-in text-to-speech tool within the app, called "immersive reader" that reads the text directly to the student.

The best part about Office Lens is that it's so simple. Scanned docs can be saved directly to OneDrive, Microsoft's service for hosting documents on the web. This allows teachers or students to access their scanned document anywhere. Office Lens is most effective on a mobile device - take a picture with your device, scan and read!

The WordQ™ is out!

By Daniel Angelicola

I am a student in secondary 4. Spelling complex words is hard for me. As a student, spelling is a big factor in everyday life, for taking notes, completing tests and assignments, etc. WordQ™ helps with that and more. It is a word prediction software that allows me to express myself in writing with greater flow and ease. It works in a variety of writing applications. It even helps you make your writing richer because it allows you to write what you are thinking about.

I use WordQ™ every day. I like quiet when I am working because I find

when you're working on a masterpiece, or whatever it may be, you need your own space to embrace your thoughts. I am very lucky to have a resource room at Laurier Macdonald High School (English Montreal School Board), where I use this amazing program. I also use WordQ™ at home to complete my homework assignments and, yes, the school board gave me a laptop for school and home.

When I am using WordQ™ in school, it's mostly on the resource room computers because some teachers are not as open to it or simply don't know what the

program is for. For example, one teacher thought that it's cheating, but it's not because I have to choose the word that I want. It gives me a variety of five words to choose from that are similar to what I was trying to write.

When you're the only one carrying a laptop, of course you're going to feel a little bit special. The other kids might feel sorry for you. I don't let that bother me because feeling and being special is the best. If you have something that works that's going to help, then use it. I am still trying to figure out how I can use my laptop in class the best way possible, like for taking notes or finding a way that my teacher can send me the class assignments. That way I don't have to rely too much on the resource room and I can be in class.

Honestly, I can't thank WordQ™ enough. Now my teachers understand what I write, and I hand in presentable work. So when I hear the word success, I think of WordQ™ because it helps me succeed. With that in mind, I encourage my fellow peers who have the opportunity to use WordQ™ to use it because... the WordQ™ is out!

To learn more about WordQ™, read Susan Waite's article in our Spring / Summer 2017 edition, or visit <http://www.goqsoftware.com>.





Technology Feature

Huddol: A breakthrough in family support

By Mark Stollow

There are 8.1 million Canadians who work tirelessly to ensure the health and welfare of the loved ones in their care. In September of this past year, The Caregiver Network launched Huddol; the first social health network exclusively dedicated to making sure caregiving Canadians can have access to their respective care team.

Huddol is a major social innovation born from over 15 years of experience helping caregivers across the country and countless hours of creative and technological development. Considering the future of healthcare and the growing expectation being placed on families, the time is now for a major

breakthrough in family caregiver support.

When someone you love develops a health problem or has a special need, everyday can feel like life unplanned. Huddol makes it easy for caregivers to share and solve everyday care challenges together.

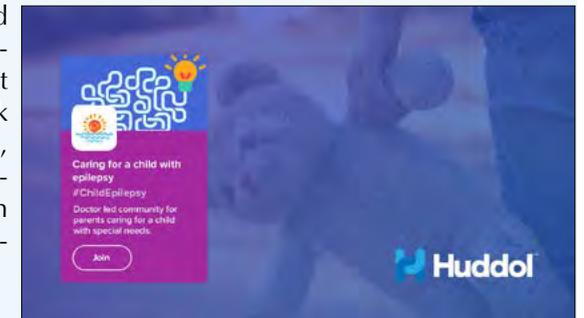
"The thing that no one prepares you for is the sheer intensity and scale of the responsibility, in addition to knowing so little about how to actually perform the tasks that are being asked of you," said Donna, caregiver to her son and mother. "That's scary when someone's life is in your hands."

Huddol helps caregivers get answers to critical health and life questions by networking the intelligence of people who have "been there and done that". Huddol is free and easy to use. You tell Huddol a little or as much as you want about your care situation (it's designed

to protect your anonymity), and using smart matching tools, Huddol builds a network of intelligent support around you. This network might include people like you, experts who can guide you, or private and public resources that can give you or your loved one a helping hand.

Family caregivers assume 75 percent of all the responsibility in caring for loved ones, making their role essential but also a potential health hazard for both parties. The negative consequences of caregiving on a caregivers' health are well documented and include higher mortality rates, mental health issues, poverty, and social isolation to name just a few.

Dr. Sasha Dubrovsky, Emergency Room doctor at the Montreal's Children's Hospital and caregiver to his son Zach who has epilepsy, is benefitting from the network. "Huddol is dedicated to sup-



Example of a Huddol community dedicated to caring for a child with epilepsy.

porting families caring for a child with epilepsy. It increases their odds of success as they move through a complex experience."

Huddol is being co-funded by Telus and the New Horizons for Seniors Program of the Government of Canada.

Families interested in joining the Huddol community can visit huddol.com or download the app on the Apple store website. —*—

Post-secondary students access assistive technology with help of parents

By Alice Havel, Laura King, Maegan Harvison, and Christine Vo

In May of 2017, the Adaptech Research Network hosted a three-day conference at Dawson College, focusing on stakeholder perspectives regarding technology and its accessibility for students with disabilities in post-secondary education. This was the second of five international conferences organized by the Ed-ICT International Network, under the leadership of Jane Seale of the Open University of the United Kingdom, and funded by the Leverhulme Trust.

The goal of Ed-ICT is to explore new perspectives on how post-secondary institutions can better use technology to remove the ongoing barriers and exclusion of students with disabilities. Along with representatives from five countries (Canada, USA, UK, Germany and Israel), there were local participants from various stakeholder groups including students with disabilities, disability service providers, faculty, computer tech-

nology staff, digital publishers and senior administrators.

Six post-secondary students with disabilities were invited to participate in a panel discussion on the topic of technology, responded to questions such as: what barriers have you encountered in using technology effectively, who should be involved in making technology accessible and usable to students with disabilities, and who and what had helped them access and use technology? Their responses were insightful, varied and in some cases, surprising.

One student who experienced a lengthy rehabilitation process as a young adult, due to an acquired motor impairment, shared that her parents point out potentially useful new technology to her. She researches their suggestions on Google or YouTube to judge for herself whether it is worthwhile to pursue further. An-



Members of the student panel at the Ed-ICT International Network Conference held at Dawson College in Montreal, May 2017. (Photo credit, Catherine Fichten)

other student, blind since infancy, described how her parents advocated for her until she was old enough to advocate for herself. They made sure that she had access to assistive technology, and taught her to use the right tool in her technology toolbox for the right job.

These two students reminded us that it is not solely the responsibility of rehabilitation centers and educational institutions to help individuals access and use technology; parents are also key stakeholders. Some parents may find this

daunting, as they don't feel adequately informed.

Fortunately, Adaptech provides parents with bilingual, updated information on free and inexpensive computer technologies for post-secondary students with disabilities (<http://www.adaptech.org/en/research/fandi>).

Adaptech describes built-in accessibility features, software and hardware for Windows and Macintosh computers, as well as mobile apps for Android and Apple devices. The database is categorized by need (adapted keyboards, writing tools, screen readers) which makes searching easier for non-techie types. Since the conference taught us that parents often pave the way for their children's academic success, checking out this database is a must for parents who want to expand their own toolboxes.

Adaptech is a team of academics, students and consumers. For information, contact Alice Havel at ahavel@dawsoncollege.qc.ca. —*—



The Transforming Autism Care Consortium: An innovative and unique new autism research network

By Nick Katalifos

The challenges individuals and their families face when

dealing with autism continues to be well document, and a wide variety of organizations are working diligently to improve what is a complex situation. At present, one out of 68 children receives the diagnosis, representing a very significant portion of the population. As daunting as the challenges may be, the autism community received some extremely encouraging news in Montreal on October 23, 2017, with the establishment of the Transforming Autism Care Consortium (TACC), a formally designated thematic network by the Fonds de recherche du Québec – Santé.

TACC is the result of a united vision to bring together the top autism researchers in Quebec, creating a world-class hub of expertise. This unique initiative for collaboration brings together more than 40 researchers from different institutes in Quebec comprising seen universities (including McGill and Université de Montréal), five university health centres, and over 200 clinicians, train-

ees, and other highly qualified personnel, with more professionals continuing to be recruited. The plan includes the rapid development of a highly coordinated autism research structure across our province.

As such, the TACC's combined knowledge in the area of autism research is meant to enhance actual care through a variety of means including: the improvement of access and availability of research expertise and resources; collaboration and coordination across institutions, sectors and disciplines; the integration of knowledge in practice and policy. Ultimately, this will help to advance personalized care and to model the future of services in autism. The TACC will pursue three main objectives.

The development of a database of 1,000 families compiling cellular, brain and behavioural profiles based on clinical visits will benefit families directly while allowing them the opportunity to participate in research. A multi-site protocol for this approach has been established. The latter includes genetic and genomic analysis, behavioural and cognitive assessment (language, reasoning, perception, interests and sensory processing,

etc.), as well as the use of electroencephalography (EEG), magnetic resonance imaging (MRI), and so on. The knowledge gathered from this database will be actively exploited to build upon the rapid impact of research on autism care.

Capacity building. The TACC intends to develop innovative training programs and to fund major research initiatives while offering trainees fellowships and mentoring in an effort to prepare responsible, independent researchers. The goal is not only to foster trainees' scientific skills but to develop leaders and information disseminators in the autism community.

Integration of autism researchers from all domains, and clinicians, educators, advocacy groups and government, to effectively communicate legitimate research progress and discoveries. This issue is of particular concern and involves the development of strategies to encourage the highest possible level of knowledge dissemination. The goal is to ensure active partnerships between researchers and members of the wider community, including decision makers in health, education and social

networks.

The vision of the TACC, supported by the consortium's member institutions as well as a group of foundation partners, is broad and bold. Statistically, there is no doubt that autism affects an enormous number of individuals and families, necessitating the continued, coordinated development of research initiatives that can potentially improve lives while raising awareness. There is also little doubt that our province is home to a very significant number of exceptional researchers working in the field of autism. The TACC has successfully brought these individuals together, ultimately attracting even more scientific talent to Quebec.

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

For information, visit <https://www.rtsa-tacc.com/program>.



Club ALink builds community, breaks isolation of young adults

By Wendy Singer

Club ALink is a new support organization in Montreal for families with young adults aged 18 to 40 who have neurodiverse challenges. Founded last year by two parents, Helene Donath and Harriet Sugar Miller, ALink's mission is to create an inclusive community for young adults with special needs.

"We want to build a community in which our young adults live, work and play side by side with others, not in iso-

lation as is usually the case," says Sugar Miller. "The response has been overwhelming. There are so many wonderful organizations and people here in Montreal who are dedicated to improving the world, and we're creating alliances among them that are synergistic. It's a win, win, win for all of us."

Recently, Federation CJA conducted focus groups with families and identified the community's needs such as housing,

jobs and social opportunities. The organization provided seed money to create social programs, which The ADATH in Hampstead is now hosting on Saturday and Sunday afternoons.

ALink has also started a Compatibility Project. They interview young adults and their families, and connect those with similar interests and abilities. "We realized quickly that we couldn't just throw everybody into one room and call it a social gathering," says Sugar Miller. "That would be like throwing everybody with blue eyes into a program and telling them to get along because they have the same colour eyes."

ALink is also mobilizing families to work together to create housing options. "The situation is deplorable," says Sugar Miller. "There is a 12 to 14-year wait-

ing list for group homes and we're being told not to even apply because the spaces are reserved for those in crisis."

Dr. Shari Brotman, a professor in McGill's School of Social Work, recently produced a report on supportive housing models, and ALink is now using that report as a blueprint for moving forward. Its monthly housing meetings are open to all parents, guardians and support workers.

For information about Club ALink's housing committee, visit Club ALink's Facebook page. To participate in the social programs or to set up an interview for the Compatibility Project, contact Kelly Grevatt at kellygrevatt@icloud.com.





Students pitch in to distribute *Inspirations*

By Wendy Singer

While *Inspirations* is distributed via many routes, one of the most effective ways of reaching families, teachers and administrators is through our internal school board distribution. We are fortunate to have tremendous partnerships with students at CDC Vimont of the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board (with Heather Halman, director of Adult Education at CDC



CDC Vimont students, teachers and attendants bundle *Inspirations* at CDC Vimont for SWLSB schools. (Photo credit, CDC Vimont)

Laurier), and the LIFE Centre of the Lester B. Pearson School Board (with Catherine Burrell, special education technician at the LIFE Centre). Students prepare bundles of *Inspirations* for school in their boards, providing an invaluable service to *Inspirations* and the community, and gaining valuable work experience in the process.

Last spring, LIFE students partnered with their peers from Lindsay Place High School, making this a collaborative, inclusive project. "Our main worker, Alex Slater, was proud to do this job. It was very successful," shared Burrell. With the arrival of the Fall 2017 / Winter 2018 edition, we welcome John Grant High School Students (English Montreal School Board) to the distribution team!

For the past seven years, *Inspirations* has partnered with Summit School's T.E.C.C., first collaborating with Jesse Heffring, and now



LIFE Centre's Alex Slater proudly did an amazing job packaging *Inspirations*. (Photo credit, Catherine Burrell)

Naomi Ellingsen. These fabulous students prepare our external mailing in record time, and are efficient, accurate, and fun to work with. They also takes a few bundles to distribute by foot to readers located near their school.

Delivering *Inspirations* to you is a team effort. Special thanks to all of our students who do such a great job – we couldn't do it without you.



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Jacques Chagnon
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Permettez-moi de saluer l'engagement et la générosité exceptionnelle de toutes les personnes contribuant au Journal Inspirations!

Allow me to salute the commitment and exceptional generosity of everyone at Inspirations Newspaper

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The 2017 Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2017: Celebrating Catherine Burrell



On June 14, the LIFE Centre students and staff celebrated Catherine Burrell at a joyful ceremony at Lindsay Place High School. Special Education Technician Burrell was instrumental in the creation of the LIFE (Learning Independence through Functional Education) program at the

Lester B. Pearson School Board in 2012. Burrell embraced the opportunity to celebrate with her students and colleagues, including teacher Cindy Andersen and Diisa Niemi, vice-principal of Horizon High School. (Photo credit, LIFE program)

The EMSB Database of Special Needs Resources has over 500 listings

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A concerned mother laid the groundwork for Angelman Quebec

By Martin C. Barry



Sophie Dubé in an exercise room at Angelman Quebec's respite centre.

The Quebec Angelman Syndrome Foundation, which provides respite and day care for children and their families affected by Angelman syndrome, was born from a parent's determination to get at the truth about a mysterious condition that her son had.

Angelman syndrome is a rare genetic and neurological disorder that occurs in one in 15,000 live births. It causes general developmental delays, epilepsy and absence of speech. Despite these features, Angelman syndrome remains unfamiliar to most people.

What's more, it is often misdiagnosed as autism or cerebral palsy. Individuals with Angelman syndrome require lifelong care. Treatment is generally sup-

portive in nature and no cure is currently available.

While the syndrome is named after British pediatrician Harry Angelman who first described it in 1965, those that have it are often affectionately referred to as "angels" by their parents or caregivers. The portrait of a typical angel includes global developmental delays, absence of speech, epilepsy, walking and balance problems, sleep disturbances, as well as frequent smiling, laughing and a seemingly happy demeanour. According to Angelman Quebec, angels understand a lot more than they are usually

able to demonstrate, have an inherent curiosity about people, and form close bonds with others.

From Angelman Quebec's creation in 2005, it took around eight years for members to raise \$2 million to fund projects. One of the first a little more than two years ago was the purchase of a former commercial/industrial building in Pierrefonds, which was renovated and repurposed to become the foundation's headquarters.

Because the building's previous owner was a retailer/installer of hot tubs and swimming pools, it came with three pools, two of which remain in use today for some of the foundation's programs. But by far, respite is the centre's most valuable service.

Since caring for children with Angelman syndrome is demanding, it is common for families to feel exhausted and at a loss. As such, the respite centre provides a much needed break.

At the centre, angels participate in activities, including swimming, music therapy, cycling, occupational therapy, augmentative speech therapy, and multi-sensory stimulation provided in a specially-designed sensory room.

Although Angelman Quebec caters specifically to those with Angelman syndrome, the foundation's services are open to anyone with autism or an intellectual disability, says Sophie Dubé,

the foundation's principal motivator and founder.

Dubé began developing an interest in Angelman syndrome when her son, Luca's diagnosis was not initially confirmed at a Montreal pediatric hospital. Luca, now 16, was then three years old and had been having intractable seizures for two years. "We tried all the medications, all the combinations," his mother said, adding nothing worked. Dubé, a psychotherapist by profession, was alerted to Angelman syndrome through the web. When she shared the information with the hospital, they said her son didn't fit the profile. Since she was pregnant at the time, Dubé was concerned her second child may be born with the syndrome.

Some weeks later, following genetic testing, Dubé was summoned to the hospital where staff confirmed Luca did have Angelman syndrome. After that, the energy that drove Dubé to find the underlying cause of her son's problems turned into a determination to establish the Angelman Quebec Foundation.

Today, Angelman Quebec's membership includes up to 80 families. "We're a large community," said Dubé. "People come from far and wide – from Ottawa, Sherbrooke, Quebec City – for our gatherings, our walk-a-thon, our Christmas parties."

For information visit www.angelman.ca.



How to talk about drugs so kids will listen

By Tamara Schwager

Talking to kids about drugs can sometimes feel like traversing a minefield. In order to have "The Talk" in a way that kids respond, we first need to understand how their brains work and develop.

Tween and teen years are largely a time of identity development, exploration and meaning making. In this period, children's brains are working overtime to take in, process and make sense of new information. As their brains devel-

op, the way they understand and experience the world changes. Growth and development rates vary considerably, however, research has shown that our prefrontal cortex (the area of our brain that helps us to determine risk, make decisions and react in social situations) is not fully developed until close to the age of 30. Most children and teens are not in the position to make prudent or well-informed decisions.

Our ultimate job as caregivers is to equip

our children with tools and information to make the best possible choices in the moment. To do so, adults must have frank and honest conversations about these issues on a regular basis.

Research indicates that by the age of 13, more than 30 percent of Canadian students have already tried marijuana at least once. Children who have tried marijuana are also more likely to engage in other risk-taking behaviours such as underage drinking, promiscuous sexual activity and gambling. Waiting to talk to kids about drugs can result in more instances of drug use than would have otherwise occurred. Starting the conversation about healthy versus unhealthy lifestyle choices from as young as Grade 3 can help lay the groundwork for continued discussions.

Children need to be taught the real facts about drugs, including the impact they have on brain development, the reasons why teens are more likely to use and become addicted to drugs, and the short and long-term effects that drugs have on their bodies and their relationships. This information should be shared with them openly and with as little judgment as possible. Reinforce the message that they can come to you with any questions or concerns. Encourage their curiosity and honesty and promise to help them find whatever information they need. Talk to them about the pressures they face and share your own experiences. Help them identify healthy coping strategies

Continued on page 38



Director's debut: The story behind the scenes

By Steven Atme

It was May 2016 when I realized the following year would mark the fifth anniversary of my speech, *Special People Have Dreams*. After trying to decide what to do, an idea came to mind: to organize and direct a variety show for adults with special needs. Why not do something different? I shared my thoughts with my family and they agreed it was a good idea.

It was very exciting and challenging to implement this idea, but I was up for it. I began the project by finding talented people who would like to participate in the show through Facebook.

The first day of rehearsal was September

24, 2016, at Centre Greene in Westmount. Our first few meetings included a discussion of ideas for skits; both individual and as a group. Everyone was happy to be part of this journey, fulfilling their dreams and inspiring others. I already knew most of the participants because they are my friends. Some have done shows before, others were new to the stage. Our troupe included actors, a guitarist and songwriter, singers, and two of my piano students.

Seeing everyone getting along and collaborating as a team was beautiful. We felt like a family because we've all lived through the same obstacles: struggling with our disabilities, gaining accep-

The Special People Have Dreams 5th Anniversary Celebration talent show troupe perform at Lindsay Place High School.



tance from society as people, sharing our ideas and talents, and discouragement from achieving our dreams. Those were the main reasons why I organized the Special People Have Dreams 5th Anniversary Celebration talent show. Volunteers helped us rehearse our lines, backstage support, music, and sound effects. Seven months later, on April 29, 2017, the show took place at Lindsay Place High School Auditorium. It was a major success!

The "Magnificent Eight" were outstanding. They were naturals on stage, and had a blast. While I acted as host, the troupe and I performed original skits, some that were adapted from movies and television shows, and played musical numbers. The audience was

amazed, they had no idea what was in store for them. There was laughter and many tears.

Our team did an amazing job. Congratulations to George Broussalis, Gabriel Fadda, Fareed Gul, Asmin Hernandez, Samuel Lewis, Melissa Nower, Alrica Phagu, and Lucciano Vezina for a spectacular performance. I wish them all the best and to never stop following their dreams.

A talent represents a person, a composition and a message. A dream can come to life. It begins with them.

Watch videos from the show on Steven's Facebook page.



Improving sleep for children with ASD: Importance of the bedroom design

By Audrey Bigras

Chloé wakes up frequently in the night every time she hears a tiny noise in the house. William tears off the posters in his bedroom when he feels anxious. Rose wakes up before sunrise and feels tired during her school day.

Sleep issues affect 60 to 80 percent of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD)¹, for example, insomnia, nightmares, frequent waking during the night or perturbed sleep patterns (sleeping during the day, waking up very early...). These issues can negatively affect children and the day-to-day lives of their families.

Last year, Le Centre de recherche pour l'inclusion scolaire et professionnelle des étudiants en situation de handi-

cap (CRISPESH) obtained an applied research grant in which we established a framework for helping parents in designing bedrooms adapted for children with ASD, based on their sensory needs. 95 percent of children with ASD have sensory disorders² (hypersensitivity or hyposensitivity). Hence, it's important to consider them.

How can you design an ASD friendly bedroom?

Adaptation to the sensory profile: Many children with ASD can be hypersensitive, in one or more than one sense (seeing, touching, hearing, smelling...). In a bedroom, there are sensory stimuli: mirror on the wall, smell of the pillow, textile of the blanket and other stimuli.

Depending on the sensory profile, these stimuli could cause reactions (tantrum, anxiety, excitement, avoidance or indifference). The bedroom should not over-stimulate your child. It should be a safe place in which your child wants to sleep. Observing which stimuli are problematic for your child may be helpful.

Noise and light reduced: The bedroom should be a quiet place, without disturbing lights or scary noises (squeaking floors, plumbing). Thus, an aggressive alarm clock might not be the best way to wake up. Isolation from indoor and outdoor sound is primordial. Parents must also pay attention to the light in the bedroom: minimize artificial and natural light through the windows because it could be distracting. A dark bedroom is healthier for sleeping.

Stability and routine: Many children with ASD appreciate predictability in their sleep environment, especially if they can control it. Plus, establishing a good bedtime routine is a win-win situation for all.

Solidity and durability: Some children with ASD may break objects if they have a tantrum, or in response to sensory stimuli. To ensure their safety, toys, windows and furniture in the bedroom should be solid. Securing furniture to the floor is also a good idea.

It is true that children with ASD have special needs. However, these guidelines can be as beneficial for them as they can be for neurotypical children. A minimalist environment and a bedtime routine could be great for everyone.

For information, visit crispesh.com or [facebook.com/crispesh](https://www.facebook.com/crispesh). Audrey Bigras is a research professional and was the project coordinator at CRISPESH for this grant. Contact Audrey at abigras@cvm.qc.ca.

¹ Hôpital Rivière-des-Prairies (2014), *Le sommeil des enfants ayant un trouble du spectre de l'autisme (TSA)*. Repéré à <http://hrdp.qc.ca/webconcepteurcontent63/000023260000/upload/godbout/AUTISTEwebv2.pdf>.

² Stanciu, R. et Delvenne, V. (2006). *Traitement de l'information sensorielle dans les troubles du spectre autistique*. *Neuropsychiatrie de l'enfance et de l'adolescence*, 64(3), 155-162



Arts & Entertainment

The art of being unique sparks enthusiasm at Montreal Museum of Fine Arts

By Elaine Cohen

It's noon-time downtown and passersby stop in front of the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) to admire artist Dale Chihuly's stunning *The Sun*, a luminous glass-blown structure. They are mesmerized by its majestic stature but unaware of the intricacies involved connecting 1,400 sun ray wires.

Montrealer Emmanuel Alescio contributed to the wiring component. Alescio is completing a one-year socio-professional integration internship geared for individuals ages 21 and older in The Art of Being Unique program at the MMFA's In-

ternational Atelier for Education and Art Therapy Michel de la Chenelière. This innovative program is offered to persons living with autism spectrum disorder or intellectual challenges. It includes four sections: work training internship, school visits, art classes and research.

MMFA's educational programs reach out to the special needs community by focusing on education, well-being or art therapy. Sharing the Museum has been in existence for 18 years and The Art of Being Unique for two, MMFA's Education Officer of Well-being Louise Giroux explained. "As for the work training internship section of The Art of Being Unique program, we accept one or two interns at a time and with our Sharing the Museum program, we have reached out to over 450 community organizations throughout the years."

Alescio was referred by CRDI-TED Miriam. He works at MMFA twice a week under the tutelage of Giroux and he is oc-

asionally supervised by job coach Sonia Isidoro-Marzano. Alescio takes pride in describing his challenges, achievements and busy lifestyle. In addition to his stage, he holds two part-time jobs.

"I play drums and I am good at working with my hands," says Alescio, joining in the conversation. "I like it here. Everybody knows and greets me. I like to work slowly and carefully with a power drill to make sure everything turns out perfectly."

By the time his internship ends in November 2017, Alescio will have acquired numerous skills as well as matured socially and intellectually, note Giroux and Isidoro-Marzano. "He can perform tasks that involve multiple steps," said Isidoro-Marzano, explaining how he operates power tools. "We marked out all the steps and taught him how to measure, cut and sort wires. He knows how to navigate the building, deliver supplies and refill machines. We have created strategies, so he can work independently."



MMFA Education Officer of Well-being Louise Giroux, intern Emmanuel Alescio and job coach Sonia Isidoro-Marzano discuss *The Art of Being Unique* program.

Vania Aguiar, mother of a son with intellectual challenges and founder of La Fondation Les Petits Rois, initiated the program two years ago. "We called it The Art of Being Unique, and Aguiar loves it as it highlights the essence of the idea," Giroux pointed out.

For information, visit www.mbam.qc.ca.



CTV NEWS MONTREAL

PAUL KARWATSKY & MUTSUMI TAKAHASHI

WEEKNIGHTS 5 & 6



Arts & Entertainment

Seeing vision loss through a humorous lense

By Wendy Singer

Disability awareness advocate and amateur stand-up comedian Tina Mintz has a natural ability to find the funny in just about any situation.

Diagnosed with juvenile diabetes at the age of eight, Mintz continuously battles to regulate her blood sugar levels. At the age of 25, she lost all sight in her left eye due to a retinal hemorrhage, and subsequently a detached retina, glaucoma, and a cataract. Currently with only four to eight percent of vision in her right eye due to scar tissue after a retinal hemorrhage, she relies on brightness and contrast to capitalize on her remaining vision.

At the time of her vision loss, Mintz was months away from beginning her studies in journalism at Concordia University. With the assistance of her first guide dog from Leader Dogs for the Blind in Michigan, a voice synthesizer and a tape recorder, she completed her degree.

Mintz' loyal Golden Lab guide dog,

Keanna, helps her maneuver the construction-laden streets of Notre-Dame-de-Grâce. "Blindness did not come as a surprise to me. Diabetic retinopathy is not uncommon in diabetics," says Mintz. "It could have been my kidneys or my heart as well, so I'm grateful. As long as I can live and laugh and communicate, I'm fine."

Mintz provides disability awareness training in English and French with Kéroul (a Québec organization that focuses on tourism and culture for people with restricted physical ability) to groups interested in learning how to serve those with diverse needs. "The information I share is often new to students and employees. I hear a lot of 'Oh, I never thought of that,'" shares Mintz.

When providing trainings in schools, students follow Keanna as she travels from one location to another. This deepens their understanding of challenges faced by those who are blind, and the focus a guide dog needs to properly do its job. Mintz imparts two important messages in these sessions: "Remember to check in with a blind person. Let us know you're there and who you are. If you are an employee in a store, say 'I work here'. Secondly, ask: 'May I help you'? If the answer is yes, ask, 'How may I help you?'"

The obvious thing about Mintz is her quick wit and humour. "I'm not the poster child for visual impairment," she laughs. "I teach in a way that's not judgmental, just funny. That makes people feel better about learning."

When Mintz performs stand-up at local comedy venues, she presents observations about blindness and the awkwardness of the public. She describes the phenomenon of well-intentioned people holding the door open for her. But if you don't alert her to your presence, she will not be aware of your consideration! As another example, she describes the surprises she's had while relying on touch to interpret her surroundings. Mintz related her shock at her first encounter with an automatic dispenser of foamy soap with much good natured humour.

An information and trivia junkie, Mintz understands Braille and enjoys audio books. She resists using assistive technology or a cell phone, resenting the built-in obsolescence of the devices, and electronic clutter. "The more people staring at the screens the more people I bump into. They don't look up and notice," says Mintz. "When sighted-people have blinders on they are less verbal, less likely to help. That's a problem to a blind person."



Tina Mintz and Keanna enjoy a summer morning together in Notre-Dame-de-Grâce.

Mintz has lived for 32 years without her vision. Between her hobby of stand-up comedy, her trainings, and dog-sitting, she leads a busy life. "I have to be very sad or have low blood sugar to not see the funny. I may have lost one sense, but thank goodness my sense of humour kicked in," she jokes.

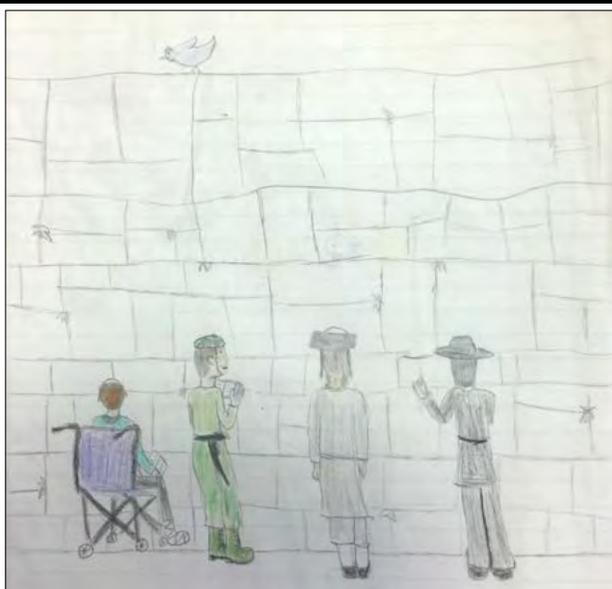
Mintz and Keanna provide bilingual disability awareness trainings to schools and organizations. For information, contact Kéroul at infos@keroul.qc.ca or (514) 252-3104.



The Western Wall for all

By Rivky Hershkop

Rivky Hershkop is a Grade 7 student at Beth Rivkah Academy.



Rivky Hershkop's interpretation of the Western Wall (Western Wall) in Jerusalem.

The Western Wall for all

People from all over the world stand there united
Prayers of all types are emotionally recited
Some expressing joy, some expressing pain
But not a single tear is shed in vain
All types of people, from all types of places
All stand there with tears rolling down their faces
Praying for livelihood, success and wealth
Or a complete recovery for other people's health
Even soldiers stand there
For their lives they do fear
With war raging on
It's hard to stay calm
People with illness, who are sick or special needs
People whose minds work at different speeds

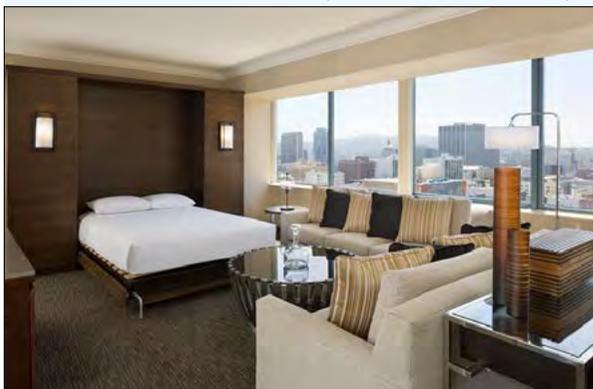


SAN FRANCISCO

Adapted Travel

By Mike Cohen

In the beautiful city of San Francisco, where my family spent a week on holiday last summer, most major museums and tourist attractions have wheelchair ramps. Many hotels offer special accommodations and services for wheelchair users and other visitors with disabilities. For the latter, an access guide is available online or via mail (at no cost) at www.sftravel.com. The Mayor's Office



A look at part of the beautiful suite at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square.

on Disability is responsible for ensuring that all public city and county services, facilities and programs are fully accessible to people with disabilities. The guide provides essential information for anyone planning an accessible (ADA) trip to San Francisco. The 32-page publication offers detailed information for individuals with disabilities on more than 150 San Francisco hotels, restaurants, museums, attractions, shopping centers, recreation, public transportation and service providers.

EVERBODY'S FAVOURITE CITY

San Francisco is often called "Everybody's Favorite City," a title earned by its scenic beauty, cultural attractions, diverse communities, and world-class cuisine. Measuring 49 square miles, this very walkable city is dotted with landmarks like the Golden Gate Bridge, cable cars, Alcatraz and the largest Chinatown in the United States. A stroll of the city's streets can lead from Union Square to North Beach to Fisherman's Wharf, with intriguing neighborhoods to explore at every turn. Views of the Pacific Ocean and San Francisco Bay are often laced with fog, creating a ro-

matic mood in this most European of American cities.

We built our week-long itinerary carefully. One of the nicest things about visiting San Francisco is that, although the city is "big" in terms of attractions and amenities, it is geographically small – only 49 square miles. Consequently, it is very easy to see and do a great many things in a short period of time.

It is also easy to spend weeks in San Francisco and still not experience everything the city has to offer. The Golden Gate Bridge, the most famous bridge in the world, manages to impress even the most experienced travelers with its stunning 1.7-mile span.

Fisherman's Wharf is also home to Pier 39, a festive waterfront marketplace that is one of the city's most popular attractions. A community of California sea lions has taken up residence on the floats in the Pier39 Marina and visitors line the nearby railing to watch their antics. From there it's a short walk to the San Francisco Dungeon and Madame Tussauds, Ripley's Believe It or Not! and the famous crab vendors selling walk-away crab and shrimp cocktails. Union Square is the place for serious shoppers. Major department stores and the most exclusive designer boutiques line streets like Post, Sutter, Geary, Grant, Stockton and Powell. The Westfield San Francisco Shopping Centre houses the largest Bloomingdale's outside of New York and the second largest Nordstrom in the U.S.

The entrance to Chinatown at Grant Avenue and Bush Street is called the "Dragon's Gate". Inside are 24 blocks of hustle and bustle, most of it taking place along Grant Avenue, the oldest street in San Francisco. This city within a city is best explored on foot; exotic shops, renowned restaurants, food markets, temples and small museums comprise its boundaries. Visitors can buy ancient potions from herb shops, relax and enjoy a

dim sum lunch or witness the making of fortune cookies.

Do consider purchasing the San Francisco CityPASS, which saves travellers up to 42 percent off combined admission to top attractions.

WHERE TO STAY

We were excited to get accommodations at the Hilton San Francisco Union Square (www.sanfrancisco.hilton.com), located in the theatre district and within walking distance to cable cars, the Moscone Center and about one mile from night clubs, Chinatown and Nob Hill. Macy's and the Westfield San Francisco Center are only a few blocks away.

This historic three-tower hotel provides rooms with city views, the Cityscape lounge on the 46th floor and a ballroom that occupies an entire floor. You can relax on their 16th floor pool deck. It's only 14 miles from the San Francisco International Airport. There are more than 1,900 rooms here, making it the largest hotel on the West Coast.

We stayed in one of the hotel's newly renovated Tower Two Luxury suites, which has a main bedroom with two Queen size beds and a small sofa. This connects to a much larger room – called a parlor – which features a Murphy bed, two sofas, a round dining room table that can seat six and windows on all sides. Combined you have two bathrooms, two fridges, two in-room safes, more cupboard space, which adds up to ultra-comfort. There is also a tablet in each room, which provides you with all of the necessary hotel and city information. For a nominal charge you can surf the net with it as well.

Classic guest rooms offer HDTV and Wi-Fi access while ultra-modern rooms showcase city skyline or bay views. Accessible rooms are also available. There's plenty of choice for dining here. Head to Herb 'N Kitchen where you can eat your way – sit down, grab and go, or order to your room. Urban Tavern is the place to be for breakfast and the Lobby Bar is the perfect setting to unwind after

a busy day. I enjoyed the breakfast buffet at the hotel a couple of times during my stay. It was terrific!

There are accessible guest rooms with mobility features, entry or passage doors that provide 32 inches as well as special provisions for parking, entry ways, swimming, Braille on the elevators, closed captioning on televisions or closed captioning decoders, TDD devices, a digital alarm clock available with sound and a vibrating pad, grab bars in bathroom, shower baths or roll in showers, an inflatable chair available to assist in getting in and out of a bath and a level or ramp entrance into the building.

EMBASSY SUITES AIRPORT

Here is a tip when arriving in San Francisco in the middle of the evening. Why head to your main hotel right away? We checked into the modern Embassy Suites by Hilton San Francisco Airport hotel. Here you can enjoy spacious accommodations in this all-suite hotel, where a separate living area and bedroom are standard features. The flexible rooms have tiered Wi-Fi available and convenient, delicious dining options at your fingertips. Their daily cooked-to-order breakfast and evening receptions with drinks are included in all reservations. They offer a complimentary shuttle bus service to and from the airport, a free daily trolley to and from Burlingame (11:30 a.m. to 9:00 p.m.) and a complimentary motor coach to downtown San Francisco on Fridays and Saturdays. The hotel is located 10 miles south of downtown San Francisco. You can take a refreshing swim in their indoor on-site swimming pool, or check out the fitness center. The tropical atrium, perfect for relaxing after work or a day out, features a beautiful koi fish pond and water fountain. The on-site restaurant is called Two Fifty and there is also a Starbucks on site. I really felt at home here and enjoyed the ambience of the gigantic lobby where I connected to free Wi-Fi and got a lot of work done squeezed between some Netflix binge watching.

The hotel is fully accessible, with a wide
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front entrance, wide hallways, several elevators, walkways above the tropical atrium. There is easy access to the pool as well. Service animals are permitted.

The hotel is located at 250 Gateway Boulevard. For more information call (650) 589-3400 or log on to www.sanfranciscoairportsouthsanfran.embassysuites.com.

HOP-ON, HOP-OFF BUS

For our first full day in San Francisco it was a no brainer to take the hop-on, hop-off Big Bus tour. You can buy your tickets in multiple ways. Log on to www.bigbustours.com and click on the San Francisco section as this company operates across the globe. Download the free App before you go. In a city like San Francisco with stunning bays, bridges and hills, this bus tour is the perfect way to sightsee. As for accessibility, Big Bus tours does operate wheelchair accessible vehicles with lifts that can accommodate a weight up to 650 pounds. The entire fleet in San Francisco is not wheelchair accessible. If you or your travelling partner(s) requires an ADA accessible vehicle, contact the company 48 hours prior to your planned tour commencement. They can then arrange for a suitable vehicle to be available at the time and location required. Passengers with mobility impairments may not be able to access the upper deck.

MUIR WOODS AND SAUSOLITO

Via Best Bay Tours (<https://best-bayreatours.com>), we experienced

the remarkable Muir Woods National Monument and the grove of coastal Sequoias (Redwoods) - the tallest trees in the world! The Muir Woods tour took us across the Golden Gate Bridge, past the Marin Headlands, and into a magical Redwood forest known as Muir Woods. Once we had a special opportunity to walk amongst these Sequoia trees. This walkway is fully wheelchair accessible.

We spent about 90 minutes in the Redwood grove. The tour then moved on to picturesque Sausalito, California, where we had a chance to shop, visit art galleries and have lunch all while gazing across the bay at beautiful San Francisco. Tour prices are \$45 for children and \$60 for adults. This does not include the \$10 entrance fee to the Muir Woods National Park.

ESCAPE TO ALCATRAZ

I have always been fascinated by Alcatraz, once home to some of America's most notorious criminals. The federal penitentiary that operated here from 1934 to 1963 brought a dark mystique to the Rock as the presence of infamous inmates like Al "Scarface" Capone, and the "Birdman" Robert Stroud helped to establish the island's notoriety. To this day, Alcatraz is best known as one of the world's most legendary prisons. A visit to Alcatraz is high on every San Francisco tourist's list. We booked our tickets via Alcatraz Cruises (www.alcatrazcruises.com), the National Park Service concessioner of ferry service to Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. Plan about two and a half hours for your visit.

Much of Alcatraz is steep and hilly, so be

prepared for walking long distances uphill. The distance from the dock to the prison at the top of the island is about 1/4 mile (0.4

km) and the elevation change is 130 feet (40 meters). This is equivalent to climbing a 13-storey building. Visitors unable to make the climb up Alcatraz's steep road can take advantage of SEAT-Sustainable Easy Access Transport - an electric shuttle that runs twice an hour from the dock to the prison building, and twice an hour from the front of the prison back to the dock. Boarding is available on a first come, first served basis. Anyone with a health condition or physical disability which limits mobility qualifies for a ride on SEAT. The use of SEAT is limited to those with the physical need only. Family and friends, who are physically able to make the walk, are advised to walk to the designated arrival area to meet SEAT passengers. One personal attendant is permitted for those who physically cannot board/disembark the tram under their own power or cannot be safely left alone. Common examples of those needing an attendant are visitors who are in wheelchairs and the visually impaired. Children of any age, on foot or in strollers, must meet the above qualifications or be under the care of a qualifying parent. There are

*Alcatraz is a major attraction.*

no wheelchairs available for loan either on Alcatraz Island or at the Pier 33 Alcatraz Landing. Large-print and Braille transcriptions of the Cellhouse Audio Tour and other interpretive materials are available upon request.

Alcatraz Landing at Pier 33 in San Francisco is fully accessible. There is limited accessible parking at Pier 33, available on a first-come, first-served basis. Individuals need to show their permanent or temporary disabled placard at the entry of Pier 33 to utilize the accessible parking spaces. In addition, an Accessibility Drop Off zone is available at Alcatraz Landing entrance for visitors with special needs arriving by automobile. For further information on Alcatraz accessibility, please call the National Park Service at (415) 561-4900.

CALIFORNIA ACADEMY OF SCIENCE

The California Academy of Sciences (<http://www.calacademy.org>) is home to an aquarium, planetarium, natural history museum, and research and educa-

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Mega-Plex
GUZZO
IMAX

www.cinemasguzzo.com**A proud supporter of Inspirations Newspaper**



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SAN FRANCISCO | Adapted Travel | *By Mike Cohen*

tion programs, which engage people of all ages and backgrounds on two of the most important topics of our time: life and its sustainability. Based in San Francisco's Golden Gate Park, it's remarkable what is housed all under one living



A look at Farallon Restaurant.

roof. The Academy's entrance and exits are fully wheelchair-accessible from either street level or the underground parking garage. All entrance lines accommodate wheelchairs. The Academy is fully wheelchair accessible, welcoming manual and electric wheelchairs. Manual wheelchairs are available to borrow free of charge at Coat Check on a first-come, first-served basis. To borrow one, visitors are asked simply to leave their photo ID at Coat Check for the duration of their visit. Electric mobility scooters, and other power-driven mobility devices (OPDMDs) such as Segways are subject to reasonable restrictions in certain areas of the facility.

All exhibits have built-in detection points for the blind, and the public elevators are equipped with auditory signals. Wherever possible, exhibits have been made tactile for an enhanced experience. A person who accompanies and performs the task of interpreter for a visitor, who is blind or visually impaired, is admitted free-of-charge. Readers and specially-trained tour

guides are available with two weeks prior notice. For more information, or to book a service, call the Contact Center at (415) 379-8000 or see their Plan Your Visit page.

For the hearing impaired, transcripts are available for all regularly scheduled Planetarium shows and other multimedia in the Academy, and assistive listening transmitters are positioned in the Planetarium, Earthquake Mini-Dome Theater, and Earthquake Shake House exhibit. Any interpreter accompanying a deaf or hearing-impaired visitor (for the purpose of interpreting) is admitted free of charge. Additionally, sign-language interpreters for the Planetarium, the 3D theater in the Forum, and exhibit tours are available with two weeks prior notice. To book a service, call the Contact Center at (415) 379-8000.

DINNER AT FARALLON AND SHOW

We came upon the ideal dinner and show combination under the same roof of the Kensington Hotel at Union Square - a fabulous meal at Farallon Restaurant (www.farallonrestaurant.com), followed by an evening at the San Francisco Playhouse and a presentation of the La Cage Aux Folles, which we thoroughly enjoyed. The dinner and a show promotion that Farallon has with the Playhouse is a \$49 three-course prix fixe dinner.

Farallon has been enchanting guests for 18 years. It offers a sophisticated menu, featuring "coastal cuisine". The freshest seafood available comprises the majority of the menu, rounded out with local produce, meat, and game. Dinner entrees are priced from \$27 to \$36. We had an absolutely fabulous dinner. Our server Nancy nicely described the options and paired different wine with our appetizers and main courses. The restaurant is wheelchair accessible. Reservations for dinner are recommended by phone or Open Table. For information call (415)956-6969.

SAN FRANCISCO PLAYHOUSE

Now beginning its second decade as San Francisco's premiere Off-Broadway style theatre company, the San Fran-

cisco Playhouse (<http://sfplayhouse.org>) presents a diverse line up of shows from cutting edge, bold plays direct from Broadway runs to innovative musicals like Bloody Bloody Andrew Jackson or classics. The Playhouse has a cool bar and happy hour, as well as the diverse entertainment offering, presenting a wide range of theatre including premieres by new writers, all in an intimate setting of 200 seats. They are in performances throughout the year, so there is always something for people to see. I'd make this an automatic stop for any planned trip to San Francisco. You can find the full lineup of their productions planned through September 2018 on their website. There is elevator service.

JOHN'S GRILL

There is a very historic restaurant in San Francisco called John's Grill (www.johnsgrill.com). This is one of the city's oldest and most famous dining establishments, born in 1908, known for its great steaks, seafood, salads and pastas and the price is indeed right. The restaurant was actually a setting in author Dashiell Hammett's *The Maltese Falcon*. You will be impressed with the interior, complete with original period furnishings as well as a kind of virtual museum of authentic memorabilia. Little did we realize that there were two more floors and a total capacity for nearly 300 diners. Last year they installed an elevator for patrons in wheelchairs or with mobility problems. Washrooms are also wheelchair accessible. On the bright and cheerful top floor a private room with a door, can accommodate a small group. This is excellent for business meetings or family gatherings.

The restaurant is located at 63 Ellis Street. It is always crowded so call first for reservations at (415) 986-3274.

PIER MARKET

Be sure to experience the Pier Market Seafood Restaurant, located at Pier 39. The family owned restaurant specializes in mesquite-grilled fresh, local, sustainable seafood and fabulous California wines enjoyed while providing bay views of Alcatraz and the Pier 39 sea lions. You can also enjoy dining on their fabulous outdoor patio, perfect for people watching on the Pier. Owned

and operated by the Simmons family, who created and built Pier 39, they own three other restaurants - the Fog Harbor Fish House, the Wipeout Bar & Grill and the Biscoff Coffee Corner.

The restaurant is very much wheelchair accessible; in fact the entire pier is beautifully set up to accommodate those in wheelchairs.

Log on to www.piermarket.com for more information.

DINNER CRUISE

We had a wonderful evening on the Hornblower Dining Cruise (www.hornblower.com). You're not truly a San Franciscan, we were told, until you cruise the Bay! With the Hornblower you can embark upon an exquisite brunch, lunch, or dinner cruise, feast on shimmering Bay views of the Golden Gate Bridge and Bay Bridge, and take it that gorgeous city skyline. There is great food, special cocktails, champagne, live music, and the most stunning views in town. We chose a three-hour dinner cruise, complete with a four-course seated dinner. Our server Lupita welcomed us to our table with some glasses of sparkling wine, summer spinach salads and a basket of fresh bread. We each enjoyed some piping hot tomato basil soup and ordered the herb roasted chicken breast, with risotto cake, seasonal vegetables and lemon butter sauce and the braised lamb shank with parmesan truffle mashed potatoes and seasonable vegetables. Decadent chocolate flourless cake with raspberry glaze topped off one fine meal.

You can call (415) 788-8866 or email sf@hornblower.com Monday to Friday. Hornblower does have accessible yachts in the fleet. However, not all yachts and decks are accessible. Call 1 (888) 467-6256 to ensure wheelchair accessibility for the date you are planning to cruise.

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





A new chapter begins for Lori Rubin

By Wendy Singer

After 26 years of working as a behaviour specialist at the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), *Inspirations* contributor Lori Rubin has decided to retire. She leaves tall boots to fill both in the Student Services Department and on the *Inspirations* editorial team.

Lori began her career working on the Project Harbour team, a school-based intervention program designed to assist and train teachers, administrators and child care workers in coping with students exhibiting disruptive behaviours. She went on to become the coordinator of the program and then the



Lori Rubin

behaviour management specialist in the Student Services Department. She also consulted on serious behavioural issues with students, parents, and teachers, led anti-bullying and social skills groups, delivered workshops, interviewed and supported the EMSB's child care workers, and was a member of the Traumatic

Events Support Team. "When I began, the EMSB had about 25 child care workers. Now we have over 300, with thousands of students that require support with emotional and family problems, instability, autism spectrum disorder, and many other challenges," shared Rubin.

Director of Student Services at the EMSB Lew Lewis worked closely with Rubin since the 1993-94 school year, and describes her as an invaluable asset to the Student Services Department. "Lori is a knowledgeable and intelligent professional, and a genuine, warm and sensitive human being," said Lewis. "She is well respected, dedicated, insightful, a supportive team player, and a true leader. We will miss her very much and extend our best wishes to her in all of her future endeavors."

Lori leaves the EMSB feeling satisfied after a fulfilling career: "I've loved every single minute. The opportunity to acquire and accumulate the skills needed to help students and teachers was an honour and a privilege. My colleagues and managers in the Student Services Department are the most devoted and

talented group of people I have ever met. It's been a privilege and inspiration to work alongside them every day. I hope that I, in turn, was able to inspire them and those that I supported," she added.

Lori certainly has accomplished that. Her keen instincts and sensitivity allowed her to bring difficult topics to the pages of *Inspirations*, most recently the popular: *I love you but I'm losing it!* and *How to avoid burning out when raising a child with special needs* articles. Never shying away from challenging or awkward topics that need to be addressed, her words lent much needed support to parents and teachers who were grateful for her honesty and relatability. Lori also co-chaired Team Inspirations at the Scotia Bank Run Charity Challenge last spring.

We will miss Lori - her support and confidence in our mission, her energy, insight and experience. On behalf of the *Inspirations* team, we wish her the best as she begins a new chapter in her life.



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Sports

By Daniel Smajovits

Adapted tennis serves as advantage for L.I.N.K.S. after school student

By Sharon Scimeca

L.I.N.K.S. High School of the English Montreal School Board has implemented an after-school program for its special needs students. The program includes a variety of therapeutic and stimulating activities along with programs intended to promote life skills. Activities include art and drama therapy, singing and playing instruments in a glee club, cooking, gardening, and adapted tennis.

Eighteen-year old L.I.N.K.S. student Dimitri Fiskas has experienced an incredible amount of growth and perseverance from participating in the adapted tennis program offered by Proset Autism (an adapted tennis program for students with special needs).

Tennis appears to be a sport that requires a lot of attention, speed and the ability to

visually track the ball and react quickly. Fiskas' inability to see makes him fully dependent on his sense of sound and touch. In order for him to enjoy playing tennis with his peers, adapted equipment is used.

Tennis instructor Cas Ternynck taught Fiskas using a foam ball with a bell inside as a directional target. This helps him listen to where the ball is in relation to where he is standing. "With a lot of practice, Dimitri was able to hit the ball against the wall. He listened to where it landed as it bounced, and in turn caught the ball in a fishing net," said Ternynck.

Once he mastered the principles of proximity and timing, Fiskas learnt how to use his strength to hit the ball using a tennis racket, to properly position his

body, and hold his racket to allow for an accurate shot.

For nine weeks, Fiskas needed assistance to accurately hit the ball over the net in a one-on-one tennis match. On the tenth week, he made his first accurate shot over the net without any assistance. As Ternynck, educators and peers cheered him on, a huge smile appeared on his face expressing how proud he was of himself. Witnessing this moment was truly magical.

"Not being able to see has made playing tennis challenging for me, but I always push myself to do the best I can," shared Fiskas. "I feel lucky to have had supportive peers and educators that are by my side. They have helped me reach my goals. I am very proud of myself for how far I have come."

Fiskas is a great example of what having confidence, perseverance and a positive attitude can lead to. He continues to play tennis in the after school program and is consistently challenging himself to reach new goals.



Cas Ternynck, adapted tennis instructor, teaches L.I.N.K.S. High School student Dimitri Fiskas how to aim the tennis ball during a Proset Autism tennis class.

ProSet Autism is a non-profit organization offering an adapted sports program for children, teens and adults with PDD-NOS, ADD, behavioural issues, and autism. For information, visit prosetautism.ca.



How to talk about drugs so kids will listen

Continued from page 30

to use when they feel overwhelmed instead of looking to substances to help them relax. Work with them to brainstorm some responses they can use if confronted with an offer to use drugs or peer pressure. Teach them to use the I.D.E.A.L. Problem Solving Model when making tough decisions in the heat of the moment: Identify the problem, Describe all the potential solutions, Evaluate the pros and cons of possible solution, Act on one of the solutions and Learn from the lesson.

Remind kids that they have the capacity to make good choices when it comes to drugs. Be open, non-judgmental, honest, available as a resource, and keep them informed. Your goal is to teach them to make their own decisions when the time comes.

Tamara Schwager is a supervisor in the Ometz School Department. She can be reached at tamara.schwager@ometz.ca or (514) 342-0000.



Invictus Games celebrate the power of sport



Initiated in 2014 in London, England by Prince Harry, The Invictus Games use the power of sport to inspire recovery, support rehabilitation and generate a wider understanding and respect for wounded, injured, and sick Servicemen and women. The third Invictus Games took place in Toronto from September 23 to 30, bringing together more than 550 competitors from 17 nations.

Adapted sports this year were: archery, athletics, indoor rowing, powerlifting, road cycling, sitting

volleyball, swimming, wheelchair basketball, wheelchair tennis, wheelchair rugby, and golf. In this photo, St-Eustache native Julie Marcotte competes in a recumbent cycle race, winning her first gold medal at the 2017 games. Marcotte broke vertebrae in her spine during a training accident in the military and suffers from chronic pain. She also competes in powerlifting and wheelchair basketball. (Photo credit, Canadian Forces Morale and Welfare Services)



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