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Spring / Summer 2016
Printemps / Été 2016



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*Stefano Ruvo and his sisters, Maria and Victoria, with P.K. Subban at the Montreal Children's Hospital. Subban gave a \$10-million donation to the hospital. (Photo credit, Vito Ruvo)
Read more about Stefano on page 8 of this edition.*



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Sensory room enhances learning at Carlyle Elementary School



Students enjoy the sensory room at Carlyle Elementary School.
(Photo credit, Daniel Smajovits)

By Tania Piperni, M.Ed

Carlyle Elementary School, an International Baccalaureate School in the Town of Mont Royal within the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), inaugurated their sensory room on June 1, 2015. As an English Core School, Carlyle has many students with special needs among their population, including those with Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD).

The school saw a need to create a safe haven to help all students self-regulate, relax, and learn in small groups. This sensory room is specifically designed to develop children's senses: hearing, sight, touch and smell, through lighting, music and objects. The room has also become a vital therapeutic tool for children with ASD as well as those with limited communication abilities. "When using the sensory room, the students enjoy a range of sensory experiences that can enhance their therapy, learning, and relaxation," says Anna-Maria Borsellino, principal at Carlyle International School.

This project was made possible through fundraising and generous donations from a variety of interested parties in the Carlyle family. Half the proceeds were raised by the John and Styvia Kyres family, whose daughter has special needs and attends Carlyle. They held a fundraising dinner at their family-run restaurant and donated all the money raised to the sensory room project, resulting in covering half the costs. One quarter of the funding was also provided through the EMSB B.A.S.E. Daycare program headed by Rosa Fuoco; the last quarter was covered by the EMSB Deputy Director General, a position then held by Roma Medwid.

Once all the funding was raised, the renovations had to get started. Julian Ramsay and his team at the Sherwin Williams Company came to the rescue! Through donated workers' time as well as all the necessary paint, they turned this simple meeting room into a beautiful, safe room.

Each day a variety of students at Carlyle International enter into their sensory room where the interactive equipment helps them regulate, re-energize and soothe themselves. This is due to the collaboration between a school and its community towards differentiation and acceptance of all learners.

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

INSPIRATIONS

Inspirations is produced by the Communications and Marketing Division and the Student Services Department of the English Montreal School Board and distributed across the Greater Montreal, Laval-Laurentians and South Shore areas.

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Laval becomes the first autism-inclusive city in Quebec

Guest Editorial by Nick Katalifos

When one considers the many challenges families must face when dealing with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) diagnosis, the initial concerns normally revolve around the issue of early assessment and the often daunting prospect of finding credible services. Parents instinctively seek out others experiencing the same or a similar situation in an effort to network, get support and give their children the best possible opportunity to develop and indeed, to succeed. After the decisions are made regarding therapies, daycares, schools and the realities of schedules are dealt with, what rapidly becomes obvious are the many challenges families with autistic children can face in their daily lives and the communities they live in.

The question of community was a primary theme at the first joint Autism in Motion-Giant Steps Conference that took place in March of 2014 and focused upon critical issues such as housing, education, employment, and the creation of truly "Autism-Friendly" cities. According to the Centers for Disease Control, one in 68 children is diagnosed with autism (report: March 27, 2014).

At a special round table discussion, participants from a wide variety of organizations, agencies, schools, parent groups, etc., discussed the possibility of approaching individual municipalities to consider autism when developing strategic plans and services. It would have been easy to ask "...Do we even try?" Happily, the question eventually settled upon was "what city do we talk to?" As a result, a theoretical discussion led to a very concrete proposal to the City of Laval which already boasts a number of effective policies designed to aid people with disabilities. Ultimately, the team at Giant Steps approached David De Cotis, Vice-President of the Executive Committee of the City of Laval early in 2015.

Discussions began in earnest, beginning with what exactly was hoped for to ensure Laval becomes more inclusive for individuals and families living with autism within

the city's boundaries. Members from the Giant Steps administration, resource center and board of directors met with Mr. De Cotis, Mr. Raynald Adams (member of the city executive and chair of its advisory committee on accessibility). Mayor Marc Demers then discussed the project with members of Laval's administration.

With the leadership of the City of Laval firmly behind the project, the process of making the municipality truly autism-inclusive began. Autism-awareness training was organized for the city's police and fire departments as well as the Société de Transport de Laval (STL), whose directorships enthusiastically endorsed the plan. The training of first responders who must inevitably deal with people on the spectrum is an approach that has already been considered and randomly carried out by individual departments in other cities. However, what sets Laval apart is the intention to follow up on this training even further.

On December 3, 2015, the City of Laval and Giant Steps School and Resource Center held a press conference, officially launching the project. Mayor Demers stated emphatically that "All residents should be able to lead a free and active life. And that is why it is high time for major cities to take the necessary steps to give freedom to everyone, including people with autism." With this approach, the city is not only working with Giant Steps to train staff and raise awareness, but to create a voluntary autism registry that families can utilize and first responders can refer to.

Furthermore, the city is working with Giant Steps to encourage local agencies, municipal organizations and businesses to be more inclusive for individuals with autism. For example, Laval boasts two museums, the Cosmodome and the Laval Symphony, among others. Thanks to Autism Speaks Canada, the local Cineplex Theater now screens sensory-friendly versions of films once per month. The city, Giant Steps and Autism in Motion are currently organizing a major conference which will take place in



Laval Police Chief Pierre Brochet, Charles Lafortune, entertainer, Remrov Vormer, guest of honour and artist, Mayor of Laval Marc Demers, and Robert Séguin, director of Fire Safety and Security of the City of Laval, at the press conference on December 3, 2015.

(Photo courtesy of the City of Laval)

October that will focus on the local business community and employment opportunities for people on the spectrum, all in a concerted effort to truly involve autistic people in the daily activities of Laval.

This effort has not gone unnoticed, with Giant Steps receiving a grant from Autism Speaks Canada in the amount of \$65,000. The funds will not only support the Laval initiative but will hopefully lead to similar projects in other municipalities. Preliminary discussions have already begun with Mayor Coderre about an autism-inclusive project for Montreal.

What is needed, is a true understanding of

what autistic people deal with on a daily basis. As Remrov Vormer, a talented artist living with autism and member of the board at Giant Steps stated, "Autism inclusion is very important. It might look like persons with autism prefer to be alone, or would rather not have any social contact, but actually it is the exact opposite."

And to think, all of this started with a simple discussion...

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



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FROM THE HOUSE

Minister of Veterans Affairs Kent Hehr: On government, public policy, and success

By Hayley Chazan, Ottawa Bureau Chief

“Come in, come in,” he said, greeting me into his office with a warm and friendly smile.

“Grab a candy. And get one for me too.” I obliged and handed him the jar. “If you don’t take one out for me, we’ll be here all day,” he joked.

I felt embarrassed. But he laughed it off and made me, the nervous interviewer, feel at ease.

For Minister of Veterans Affairs Kent Hehr, everyday tasks like taking a candy out of a jar can be a challenge.

When he was only 21-years-old, he was the innocent victim of a drive-by shooting, which left him paralyzed. While he has regained most of the use of his hands, he still struggles with his grip. Hehr has never let his physical disability hold him back. In fact, it has made him even more determined to make a difference in the world.

The Honourable Hehr considers himself

lucky to have been born in Canada, a country with public healthcare and education. After his accident, he spent nine months in the hospital. His family never received a single medical bill. He immediately entered accessible housing that was subsidized by the provincial government, had access to care workers and the support he needed to get in and out of bed.

“Going through that process helped me understand the importance of government, the importance of good public policy, the importance of allowing people to succeed from different walks of life,” Hehr said.

Eleven months after getting out of the hospital, Hehr returned to school, graduating first with a Bachelor of Arts degree from the University of Calgary, followed by a degree in law. Upon graduation, he was named Graduate of the decade and one of the top 40 graduates over the last 40 years.

Politics had always been an interest of Hehr’s and a regular topic of conversation at his home around the dinner table, but

he never gave public life much thought until he actually became disabled. “My disability allowed me to see how government assistance could help make life better,” he said. “It encouraged me to get involved and help make a difference, even in a small way.”

Before entering federal politics, Hehr served as a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, where he represented the riding of Calgary-Buffalo from 2008 to 2015. He made the leap into federal politics this past election, and was appointed the Minister of Veterans Affairs in November.

He believes his disability helps him to relate to injured veterans who find themselves in his department. “The toughest year was the first year after my accident, when I didn’t get to play hockey and put on that jersey and be part of a group,” he said. “It was tremendously hard.”

Having that understanding, he explains, will allow him, and his department, to treat disabled veterans with the care, compassion, respect and the understanding to realize that what they go through isn’t easy.

Hehr says that to be disabled in this country generally means that you’re poor, that your life is going to be difficult, that there’s going to be increased divorce, unemployment and lesser opportunities to build a career and to succeed.

The Minister explains that in order to overcome these pitfalls, it is important that government provide individuals with equal opportunities to succeed and he hopes that the “Canadians with Disabilities Act”, which the government has committed to bring forward, will help create inroads.

Hehr’s advice to those with disabilities, whether intellectual, physical, mental or otherwise is to stay active in the community. The be all and end all is not employment, it’s being active and happy. When he was first starting out with his disability, he found a great deal of joy just by going to the coffee shop and talking with people of all walks



Hayley Chazan with Minister of Veterans Affairs Kent Hehr at the House of Commons on March 24, 2016.

of life about their day. Hehr believes it’s important to go out there and interact and share our life experiences, because by doing so, we are not only enriching our lives, but the lives of those around us.

“Disabilities are complex but we can still have wonderful lives by sharing our light with others.”

Hayley Chazan is a soon-to-be graduate of the Masters of Journalism program at Carleton University in Ottawa. She loves to tell stories and is passionate about politics and economics.

Update from Mackay Centre School

The planning of the new Mackay Centre School campus is well under way. In a recent interview with Patrizia Ciccarelli, principal of the school, she informed Inspirations that the Mackay team has been working closely with Leclerc associés architects to prepare the plans for this state-of-the-art new campus.

“We’ve taken requests from the teachers from both the Mackay Centre and the Philip E. Layton Schools, the administration, and the RPSS Team (Rehabilitation Program in Special Schools),” shared Ciccarelli. “It is going to be beautiful, and will meet the needs of all of our students.”

The new school will be located on Terbonne Avenue near Madison Avenue in N.D.G. and will house both the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton schools. The Quebec government has provided \$21.9 million for the building of the school. The

projected date to break ground is August 2016. The projected moving date is August 2018.

**** * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * * *

In the Fall 2015 / Winter 2016 edition of Inspirations, we reported that The Bildeau Fund for Adapted Sports at the MAB-Mackay ‘is meant to ensure the continuity of adapted sports programs and that once the new school is built even more children will be able to reap the rewards from the foundation.’

All sports and recreational activities at the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools are funded by the school and the English Montreal School Board. Funds donated by The Mike Reid Softball Tournament go toward the transportation of students to and from activities and events.

We welcome
Hayley Chazan as our
new Ottawa Bureau Chief.
Hayley brings a wealth of
journalistic and political
experience to Inspirations,
and we are delighted to
have her join the team!



My sensational son:

A peek into the world of Sensory Processing Disorder

By Valentina Basilicata

When I found out my son had Sensory Processing Disorder (SPD), I was relieved and scared all at once. Although I was officially entering unknown special needs territory, I felt a weight had been lifted from my shoulders. I finally had an explanation for his behavior; it wasn't all in my head.



Matthew celebrates a goal while playing hockey on his backyard rink with his brother.

My gut knew something was different about my sweet, chubby-cheeked Matthew just months after his birth. My suspicions were often dismissed by loved ones assuring me I was just an inexperienced mom. "He looks fine to me," they'd say, certain that his perfect exterior mirrored an equally perfect interior. "It's just a phase."

Matthew was a terrible sleeper, a picky eater and late achieving milestones. He was clumsy, often banging into things or falling off chairs. He chewed everything he could get his hands on. Social gatherings, crowds

and loud sounds caused lengthy meltdowns. Ordinary things like clothing tags, bath time, haircuts, teeth brushing and even clipping his nails caused him emotional and physical pain.

Things didn't improve when Matthew was ready to start kindergarten. Not knowing where to turn, a friend connected me with an occupational therapist (OT) specializing

in sensory difficulties. A lengthy Google search led me to a child psychologist in my area. Matthew was officially diagnosed at five-years-old. He also has anxiety and Developmental Coordination Disorder, two common comorbid conditions of SPD.

According to the SPD Foundation, as many as one in 20 kids are affected by SPD. However, there is little awareness about the disorder. Experts say SPD causes a neurological traffic jam preventing the brain from receiving the information needed to interpret sensory information properly. SPD can affect one, some or even all senses. It can cause an overreaction or underreaction to stimuli.

Matthew is affectionate, playful and witty. Like most nine-year-old boys, his favourite things are Lego and videogames. Yet his days are not typical. Matthew still has a hard time feeling his body in space, therefore, making his movements awkward at times. Writing is difficult and sloppy despite years of practice; he uses a laptop at school for longer assignments. Too much

noise or visual input can cause him to lose focus. A hectic day can literally make him sick, causing headaches, nausea or fever.

Matthew is in occupational therapy and psychotherapy to retrain his brain and body. He's done some physiotherapy and therapeutic horseback riding too. His symptoms persist, but are more manageable. He is also followed by an OT at school (Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board) who gives him coping strategies for success in the classroom. Movement breaks, a laptop, beanbag chairs and noise-cancelling headphones are some of the things Matthew needs to get through his school day.

Matthew has inspired me. He is resilient and brave, facing each day with a smile despite the challenges he will inevitably encounter. He has taught me patience, perseverance and most of all, how to love unconditionally.

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

The Hygiene Hypothesis: How negative experiences can actually make children stronger

By Lori Rubin

David Strachan, the British Nobel Prize winning chemist, coined the phrase *The Hygiene Hypothesis*, to describe his findings that children who grow up in extremely clean households are more likely to develop more health problems than children who are exposed to dirt and germs. His findings indicate that with exposure to germs at a young age, children develop a stronger "constitution" which enables them to fight off certain kinds of infections and maladies, as compared to their same-age peers who live in more sterile conditions. It is now recommended by the medical community to stay away from the anti-bacterial soaps and detergents that are being pushed on consumers at an alarming rate.

In the same vein, it has been determined that when parents lovingly do everything they can to protect their children from life's

emotional bumps and bruises, their children often fail to develop *resilience*, defined as "having the skills to navigate the inevitable trials, triumphs and tribulations of childhood and adolescence" (Margarita Tartakovsky, M.S., PsychCentral), or "an ability to recover from or adjust easily to misfortune or change." (Webster's Dictionary).

Granted, a parent's job is to protect their children from danger and hardship, but this can come at a cost if children are prevented from learning through lack of experience or from taking risks that are not life-threatening. If physical resilience comes from exposure in childhood to germs and bacteria, then personal resilience comes from exposure in childhood to failure, embarrassment, disappointment, grief, fear and doubt. Look at the following examples:

- When seven-year-old Shawn is not invited to a classmate's home birthday party (because he does not follow house

rules when he goes there on play dates and runs from room to room breaking toys), Mom calls the classmate's mother to "request" that she reconsider inviting Shawn, rather than using this as a teachable moment.

- When 15-year-old Keisha is grounded for a week after coming home from a friend's house after midnight, breaking her 10:00 p.m. curfew, her father agrees to let her go to a school dance after Keisha cries that she will be the only girl in her class not attending.

Both of these parents want to protect their children from being left out or rejected, but although Shawn and Keisha may experience the short-term gain of getting what they want in the moment, they may never develop the ability to learn from their mistakes and move forward. The following are some tips for raising resilient kids:

- Don't accommodate every need

- Avoid eliminating all risk
- Teach children to problem-solve
- Don't provide all the answers
- Avoid talking in catastrophic terms
- Let your kids make mistakes
- Help them to manage their emotions after a disappointment
- Model your own resiliency

The kids who are allowed to take chances, experience loss and risk failure, do not grow up to be adults who file a lawsuit when hot coffee is spilled on their laps, or who scream at a teacher when their child receives a failing grade. They grow up to be adults who don't fall apart when things don't go their way.

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



Psychology professor's insight circumvents lack of vision

By Elaine Cohen

Born blind, Rajesh Malik, Ph.D., refuses to let impaired vision impede his progress or positive outlook.

"I see it as something to live with and when I encounter an obstacle, the challenge is to find a way around it, rather than being stopped by it," the popular Dawson College psychology professor says.

"I consider myself as average," he points out, countering compliments on his academic prowess. "Some people, who lacked vision, have managed to climb Mount Everest. But I'm content with my lot in life." Malik resides in Montreal with his wife, a son and a daughter. He has been teaching at Dawson since 1992. Until 2007, he also taught a number of courses at Concordia University. Designed for teachers, these courses were administered by Concordia's Department of Education.

On the "rate your professor" website, students commend Malik's course content, teaching delivery and sensitivity. Over the

years, he has taught introductory psychology, brain and behaviour (neuroscience), abnormal psychology and statistics.

Malik was born in Jabalpur, India, and immigrated to Canada at the age of 20. He had attended one year of college in India. An older sibling, who resided in Montreal, knew her brother would have more opportunities here. Hence, Malik attained his undergraduate degree and Ph.D. at Concordia University.

"I always liked science. Psychology answered questions about the makeup of people. I was also attracted to education." Taking his situation into account, he figured what was feasible.

Malik's parents and three siblings were blessed with vision. "My parents never pushed me when I was growing up but they thought if I studied Indian classical music, it may lead to a career." Malik complied and did well but wasn't keen. Conversely, years later in Canada, he became an enthusiast of conventional classical music. In 1987, he hosted a Sunday night classical music radio program. In recent years, his children took

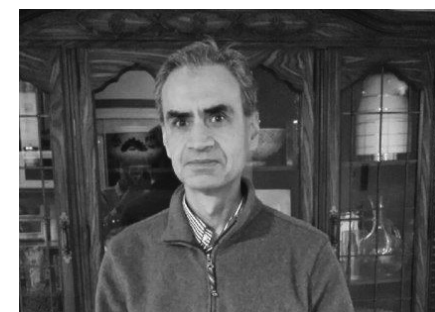
violin lessons, and his son performs with the Westmount Youth Orchestra.

Malik's early schooling was in Hindi but by Grade 5, the curriculum included English as a second language. Besides applying himself in class, he also listened to English radio and read (Braille) books.

Before the Digital Age, he benefitted from U.S. recordings for the blind. These books were available on cassette. He photocopied articles from scientific journals and had them transmitted on tape. Volunteers at the Montreal Association for the Blind offered assistance.

"Now, computers are installed with software that enables me to navigate and read books with a synthesized voice. Furthermore, everything is available on multiple platforms," Malik explains. "With access to GPS on my phone, I'm also able to plan routes and keep track of my location." He uses a white cane to travel.

Today, technology has evolved to the extent that Malik is able to be independent. Fur-



Professor Rajesh Malik.
(Photo courtesy of R. Malik)

thermore, he has adapted courses to meet the needs of millennials.

"My teaching has changed. Everything from assignments and exams can be accessed online. Since 2006, we haven't used pad or pen. There is no turning back to the days when a student's written words had to be read to me." He prepares PowerPoint presentations and compiles short videos to deliver in class. Students are assigned text book readings.

"My students must do their work but I encourage them and I am fair."

Energy Club Énergie helps students focus

By Marie-Josée Messier and Marie-Josée Paquette

The mission of Forest Hill Senior in St-Lazare (Lester B. Pearson School Board) is to provide a healthy, safe, respectful and inclusive environment in which there is flexibility for all students to reach their full potential. Following our school board's philosophy and inspired by an article from the magazine *L'Actualité* on Finland's schools, staff members at Forest Hill Senior created the Energy Club Énergie in September 2014.

This Club offers movement breaks to students with ADHD, special needs and any other students who would benefit from them. Our goal is to help students who struggle to stay focused for long periods of time. We believe it is important to teach children to take body breaks before they experience frustration, anxiety or become disruptive.

We started with six stations that were placed in the hallways. When in need of a break, students obtain a pass from their teacher,

leave the room for 10 minutes and go to a station that will offer a moderate to medium intensity level physical activity. There, they will find a box that includes any material needed, and a stopwatch.

Students come back to class re-energized and ready to concentrate. Our colleagues were also encouraged to incorporate movement in the classroom using different tools available online. Finally, our school day-care's schedule was modified to allow for students to have an outside recess before and after school hours. This made a huge impact, especially for children arriving early and leaving late.

Following a successful start, and with the contribution of a grant from the Ministry of Education of Quebec, we were able to expand our mandate. The school gym is now reserved for the Energy Club during the last period of the school day. Also, a Weekly

Challenge is offered at recess to keep students active, and Family Challenges are available to take home. To show our families how physical activity can benefit everyone, we invite them to community outings, such as skating at the park after school.

By developing healthier habits, engaging students and inspiring them to set and achieve goals, we are optimizing their success. They are better equipped to tap into their true potential. In many instances, we observed a positive impact. Our principal remarked that fewer students are sent to her office for disrupting the class and schoolyard interventions have decreased. One year after the implementation of the Club, the *Tell Them From Me* survey results show a very strong sense of belonging and a decrease in the stress level, something that was a concern before.

Walking in the hallways of our school makes us proud. Everywhere, we see evidence of a



Integration aid Dianne Allen having a movement break with student Emily Petsche.
(Photo credit, Sylvie Monette)

serene, welcoming and caring school. We owe the success of our Energy Club Énergie to the incredible support of our staff, the administration, our Home and School Association and the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

Marie-Josée Messier and Marie-Josée Paquette are Cycle 3 teachers and co-founders of Energy Club Énergie at Forest Hill Senior.



Stefano lights up Dante Elementary School

By Wendy Singer

To meet Stefano Ruvo is to fall in love. A Kindergarten student at Dante Elementary School within the English Montreal School Board, in St-Leonard, Stefano has battled multiple obstacles since birth.

Stefano was born with Congenital Central Hypoventilation Syndrome (CCHS). According to the CCHS Family Network, this is a multisystem disorder of the central nervous system where, most dramatically, the automatic control of breathing is absent or impaired. A CCHS patient's respiratory response to low blood oxygen saturation or to carbon dioxide retention is sluggish during awake hours and absent to varying degrees during sleep, serious illness, and/or stress.

CCHS is caused by a genetic mutation of the gene that plays an important role in the prenatal development of the autonomic nervous system. Rare, only 1,000 individuals with CCHS have been identified.

Stefano also has Hirschsprung's Disease, a birth defect that affects the nerve cells in the large intestine which control the muscles that normally push food and waste through it. Hirschsprung's often is seen in people with CCHS, and it is estimated that one out of every 5,000 newborn babies have it, particularly boys.

"Stefano is a little boy that always smiles and is so articulate. Everyone knows him as he is sociable and has a gift of putting a smile on the face of everyone he speaks with," shared Daniela Lattanzio, principal of Dante School. "He may have many medical complications but we somehow don't see them since he has such a positive attitude and never complains."

In and out of hospital all of his life, Stefano had a tracheostomy, which is a surgical procedure to create an opening through the neck into the trachea (windpipe), to support his breathing. He has implanted diaphragmatic pacers, which send pulses to his diaphragm that stimulate his lungs. This is used for a maximum of 12 hours a day. When he sleeps, and when he is not well, he uses a ventilator (a machine designed to mechanically move breathable air into and out of the lungs).



Stefano and his father Vito Ruvo in his special room at Dante Elementary School.



Stefano at Dante Elementary School.

Stefano requires round-the-clock nursing care. The staff at Dante have made accommodations to make his school experience as typical as possible. The school principal found a special room for him where he can receive care in privacy. The resource teachers decorated it with Montreal Canadiens posters and photos, and the caretakers painted it, adding a Habs logo. This thrilled Stefano, as he is a big Habs fan.

"Dante has accommodated Stefano and our family to help us have a normal transition into elementary school. We are forever thankful for all they have done," shares Vito Ruvo, Stefano's father.

On our way to visit his room, Stefano popped into the main administrative office, sat down at a desk and proceeded to 'work', greeting everyone that stopped by. When asked what his favourite part of school is, he said, "Playing outside!"

"He's a regular little boy," says Ruvo. "Yet he is inspirational, courageous, enthusiastic, energetic, independent and cheerful. He leaves an impression on everyone he meets."

Ruvo and his wife, Rosa Bologna, strive to raise Stefano and their twin daughters, Maria and Victoria, in as normal an environment as possible. And when people tell them they are inspirational, Ruvo retorts: "I

am just being a father."

Yet, sharing this journey with Stefano has brought them profound messages. "Small

things in life don't matter. Life matters," Ruvo reflects. "When Stefano wakes up with a smile on his face, you have nothing to complain about."



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You are not alone

By Joanne Charron

A message from the EMSB Parent Commissioner representing the special needs community

I want Parents to know that they are not alone. Even though that is the feeling that we all have at the beginning of our daunting journey through the special needs world. I want you all to know that systems are in place to guide, support, advocate, inform and help you through the special needs world you find yourself in. These systems are there for your children from birth through adulthood. They are all interconnected and can be tapped into.

Whether your child has been diagnosed early or flagged once in the school system, the key is COMMUNICATION. We need to communicate, share and express ourselves through these systems and with the professionals and staff in order to benefit from them. That is what they are there for.

Sometimes we may not even know what questions to ask, but that in and of itself is a good question. A good place to start is with your school's principal. Request a meeting if one hasn't been set up already. Your principal will be able to answer your questions, guide you, and make a plan with their staff and professionals to help your child through their academic life. They are also able to help you connect with services both internally and externally.

This is a living, dynamic process that changes with your child and through their transitions from grade to grade, elementary to secondary, and secondary to higher and adult education. Have comfort in the fact that the school board's services adapt, evolve and grow to accommodate our children's needs to provide for them throughout their years in the youth sector and through the adult sector.

The school board is there to inform, support and provide for our children as well as to make it easier for the parents to understand, navigate, and be as user-friendly as possible. Your Student Services Department works tirelessly for the success of our children and continues to innovate and create programs so that our children can reach their full potential throughout their life.

Your commissioners constantly advocate, innovate and create along with the board to ensure that we have programs to provide lifelong learning and success for all students. A perfect example of this is the creation of innovative programs to meet the demands in the Youth Sector, and the establishment of the '21 plus' committee by the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the EMSB. Since the inception of this committee, we have already seen the creation of new programs, the expansion of others, as well as plans for two points of service for special needs programs in both the East and West of Montreal.

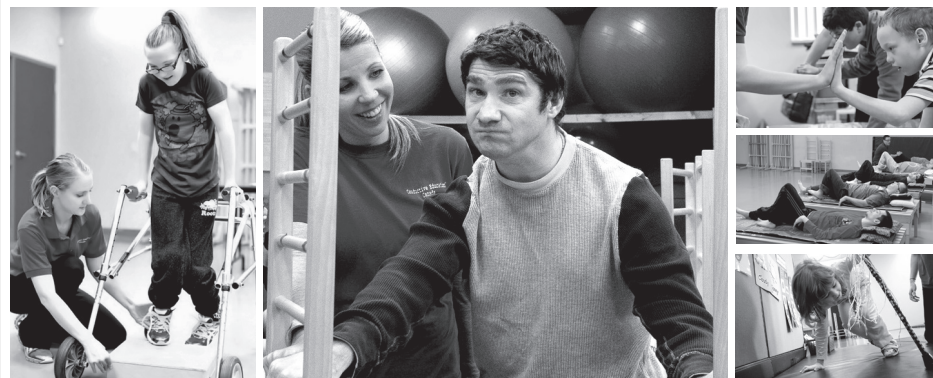
The parents are partners in the process and I must reiterate that "Communication is key" in order for this to be successful with all partners and ultimately our children. We must share information about our children, discuss concerns and strategize with one another to establish a unified approach for our children's benefit and continued success. We all want, and are working towards, the same goal. This, of course, is always done in the best interest of the child in a respectful and confidential forum.

As a Commissioner for ACSES (Advisory Committee for Special Education Services) of the English Montreal School Board, I can tell you that these systems are well established in our school boards and they are all connected both internally and externally with the Education and Health Sector, the community, and partnerships with other boards through inter-board agreements in order to service your children in the best and most successful way possible.

We are all there for you, accessible to you; just reach out to us, we are here. You are not alone.

To connect, email Joanne at joanne.charron@emsb.qc.ca.

Joanne Charron is the commissioner for ACSES (Advisory Committee for Special Education Services) of the English Montreal School Board.



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Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2016

Theresa Evans, Massey-Vanier High School: Safe at Home Base

By Wendy Singer

It is always a challenge to choose a Caregiver or Teacher of Inspiration. The nominees are all outstanding. This year, for the first time, we received three nominations for the same individual. We knew what we had to do, and are proud to name Theresa Evans from Massey-Vanier High School of the Eastern Townships School Board as the Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2016.

Theresa Evans has been a special education technician with the Eastern Townships School Board (ETSB) since 1995. She has spent 19 of these years at Massey-Vanier High School, and two at an elementary school. Prior to her career in education, she worked in office administration, was a stay-at-home mom, and later, a community volunteer. Working with students with special needs is her dream come true.

In collaboration with an extraordinary team and administration, Evans helped create Home Base; a support centre at Massey-Vanier High School that enables students with autism spectrum disorder to thrive in the high school setting. This support initiative began in 2006 with three students, a tiny room, and a mission to provide Massey-Vanier students with autism a safe place where they could feel comfortable, have down time, adjust, integrate, and succeed in the high school environment.

By 2009, this initiative was so successful that the room was enlarged to accommodate their growing numbers, and named Home Base. "It now welcomes 32 'members', or students, with either code 50 or 34, who are supervised at various levels. It has a blue room where students can decompress, a Social Thinking® room for small group work, a cubicle for each student with organized shelving, a large comfort section, and many 'down time' activity stations," wrote Julie Edwards, principal of Massey-Vanier High School, in her nomination of Evans for the Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2016.

Evans works hand-in-hand with Edwards, Massey-Vanier's Vice-Principals David Scott and Petra Bardon, Psycho Educator Bernard Messier, Resource Teacher Carolyn

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*Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2016 Theresa Evans and the Home Base Team.
(Photo courtesy of Theresa Evans and Massey-Vanier High School)*

Reynolds, and Attendants for Handicapped Students Karen Ferraz, Karen Crandall, Special Education Technician Kelli Hackett, and the teachers. Evans firmly believes in teamwork: "My passion for the success of the students would not have come to be without the support of our administration. Giving immense credit to the ETSB, Evans states that the administration put their trust in her and Home Base, providing her with ample opportunities for training.

Evans counts researching trends in autism and reading about the lives of people with autism as her greatest interest, along with oil painting, genealogy and history.

"My goal is to validate the students," shared Evans. "I get to know every student individually in order to understand their needs, hopes and goals. We spend time together, talk, and make it personal. I try to see them through their own eyes."

At the beginning of the school year, Home Base students are given a list of personality traits (such as kind, gentle, friendly, and jealous) and are asked to circle 10 that they can apply to themselves. These traits are

then shared with the group. "It is important to me that they don't label themselves as autistic," explains Evans. "They hold the paper up and say who they really are. And I tell them that their autism does not define them. These traits represent who they are."

Evans is proud to see the progress of Home Base students after their high school years. Many are employed, or attend the ETSB's Work-Orientation Training Pathways or Challenges Program.

Evans never gives up, and believes it is important to "collect" the students. This is accomplished by empowering them over time - talking and getting to know them outside of academics, and validating their strengths. "They are not open to learning until we gather them emotionally," shares Evans. It is then that the students begin to flourish.

If you would like to nominate a Teacher of Inspiration, email mcohen@inspirationsnews.com.

Dynamic Funds was established as a small investment club in Montreal in 1957, where it was a pioneer in providing professional

*Working with
Theresa Evans
and the Home
Base Team*

By Julie Edwards

Julie Edwards, principal of Massey-Vanier High School, shared the following heartfelt thoughts when nominating Theresa Evans.

I have worked with Theresa Evans for 11 years. When we began Home Base, we did not have a lot of knowledge or outside support. Theresa is persistent, a gifted leader, a creative thinker. She is not afraid of change. She always puts the students and their needs first.

Theresa visits each student in their elementary school prior to their transition to Massey-Vanier, noting their needs, their passions, ironing out academic plans with teachers, communicating with parents, and more. She is at every Open House and every Orientation Day to greet students and their parents, setting their minds at ease.

Home Base has succeeded due to Theresa's innate instinct and understanding of her student's needs. They cannot always communicate their feelings, but she is able to read them and their actions so well that we are able to provide the secret formula for each one of them. Theresa is truly an inspiration.

investment advice to retail investors. Since then, Dynamic has evolved to become one of Canada's most recognized wealth management firms. They offer a comprehensive range of products and services, spanning every major sector, geographic region and investment discipline. Dynamic's financial solutions include open and closed-end investment funds, fee-based, tax-advantaged and customized high-net-worth programs.



Innovative 'Focus' motivates students

By Elaine Cohen

What began in September 2014 as a pilot project blossomed into an enlightening program that embraces the individual needs of students in secondary 1 to 3 at Focus in N.D.G., which is part of an outreach network of 12 EMSB schools. Principal Craig Olenik's portfolio includes the entire network; therefore, a head teacher serves as a principal presence at each school.

Students are referred to Focus from public and private schools throughout Montreal and surrounding areas. The goal is to provide alternatives for students who have not encountered success in the traditional or adapted, multi-period school setting. Thanks to Focus's innovative "refocus" approach, the students are gaining confidence and gleaming new skills.

"Instead of making students fit into our model, we reached out and designed a model to meet their needs," Tya Collins, Head Teacher at Focus, said. Students receive one-on-one attention in a class composed of eight students, a teacher and a behavioural technician. Numbers fluctuate because stu-

dents are admitted during the year.

"We found the structured model, where everything is predictable, works. Students feel safe and comfortable." Elaborating on the closed classroom, Collins described how students complete their studies with teachers in the classroom, instead of rotating. Students follow an adapted or modified curriculum determined by MELS (Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur) while benefitting from a closed-classroom learning environment, small class size and highly individualized programming, with emphasis on academics in the morning and structured social, physical, recreational and skill-based activities in the afternoon.

Students gather at school for breakfast, which is generously provided by Generations Foundation. Lunch is included in the fees, and students plan their menu and prepare the meal together. They relish fresh herbs and vegetables from the Focus garden. Their chili recipe is a favourite, Collins observes.

Students work on the point system, which is highly individualized. They plan their schedules and time slots. The mandatory



FOCUS students engage in enterprising projects.
(Photo courtesy of Focus High School)

daily curriculum includes English, French, and mathematics. They have gym every day. Science, ethics, geography and art options are factored in three times a week. A reading specialist is on-hand once a week. Big Buddies from McGill University tutor Focus students.

Students look forward to innovative after-

noon activities including animal therapy. The students worked with rats, trained them to run obstacle courses and observed how reinforcement through positive conditioning works. This activity was carried out with Dogue Shop. The SPCA Youth Ambassador Program (YAP) also proved productive. They tended to animals every week at the SPCA annex.

Other activities include swim instruction at Benny Sports Complex, first aid, an art therapist visits weekly, and culinary arts with cooking lessons through *Tablée des chefs*.

A grant courtesy of Evergreen, a Toyota company initiative, enhanced the year-long gardening program. The input of Action Communiterre, an urban agriculture and community garden project, enabled students to plan and build the entire garden. Besides the outdoor garden, the students built an indoor salad bar enhanced with a lighting system, installed a compost bin, and entered an entrepreneurial initiative with Action Communiterre.

The organization will hire two students with pay to work during the summer. Collins commends the students. "They are motivated and working hard to compete for jobs." Students must apply for the spots. Therefore, they are taught how to conduct themselves in an interview and how to prepare their curriculum vitae.

Focus students give back to the community through volunteer work at a local daycare or helping elementary school students with homework at the Loyola Centre.

Celebrating the Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration 2015

Jean-Sébastien Beauschesne: École secondaire du Mont Bruno

On a pedagogical day in January 2016, the staff of École secondaire du Mont Bruno, Commission scolaire des Patriotes, gathered in the school cafeteria.

Céline Chagnon, director of École secondaire du Mont-Bruno, used this opportunity to honour Jean-Sébastien Beauschesne with a surprise award ceremony for receiving The Dynamic Funds Teacher of Inspiration 2015.

The staff rose to their feet in delight, giving Beauschesne a lengthy and boisterous standing ovation, showing immense respect and support for their colleague.



Julie René de Cotret, Jean-Sébastien Beauschesne, Céline Chagnon, and Francine Gauthier, assistant director, Secondary 3 and FPT, École secondaire du Mont Bruno.

Julie René de Cotret, assistant director of Student Services at the English Montreal School Board, nominated Beauschesne for this honour. She spoke from her heart about the dedication that this teacher has shown to her son.

The Inspirations team gave Beauschesne a painting from The Big Blue Hug and gift certificates to Cinémas Guzzo. After sharing touching words, Céline Gauthier and the administration of École secondaire du Mont Bruno presented Jean-Sébastien with a laminated plaque featuring the Teacher of Inspiration article which was featured in the Fall 2015 / Winter 2016 edition of Inspirations.



Reading to your toddler: Why it's never too early

By Laura Caprini

Early on in my career, I attended a teacher's workshop that brought to light research and statistics about the advantages pre-schoolers gain by being read to as toddlers. Long-term studies showed a strong correlation between reading to your child early, and performance in the area of literacy in later years. I also learned how significantly different these outcomes were for children whose parents had seldom exposed them to literature based activities while in their toddler years. Doing so may very well put a child at an academic advantage later on.

Back then, the research presented was in its early stages, but impressive nonetheless. Today, thanks to advances in the field of neuroplasticity and MRI imaging, scientists can take the same study to new heights, and are able to present conclusive evidence to drive the point home one step further.

Last April, a study spearheaded by Dr. John Hutton of the Cincinnati Children's Hospi-



tal, revealed new evidence which theorizes that reading to a child in the early years benefits brain development, which, in turn, sets the stage for early literacy skills acqui-

sition. This study, using magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) on 19 three to five-year-olds while they listened to stories being read to them, revealed a significant amount of activity in the cerebral left hemisphere, the part of the brain primarily responsible for reading and language development. The reading process, scientists concluded, creates images in the listener's mind, which stimulates brain activity and sparks the critical development of neural pathways.

As teachers, it is quite easy to pick out students who were read to early on. Often, it is these students for whom reading skills acquisition comes easily. They look forward to going to the library, and love to read to an audience and/or be read to. We love to see this, as it makes our jobs that much easier.

Having a picture book read aloud is a multi-sensory experience and a tool that assists in vocabulary-building, and reinforces pronunciation and expression, in the case of speech and language challenges. Many books designed for toddlers have textures to explore or tabs to lift to reveal surprises, and they all have pages to turn. This encourages natural curiosity and provides fun practice for fine motor skills and an avenue for working through particular sensitivities.

Reading together encourages children on the autism spectrum to engage in an activity which provides relatable characters and exposure to sequencing. Unlike television

or movie-watching, sharing a book with a loving parent is an interactive experience, which does not come with a finite time frame. Little ones' attention spans can be gradually extended through reading together.

The best gift we can give our children, our presence, is required in order to read with them. And, in turn, we are witnesses to their pleasure and their wonder when they discover something new.


For all new parents out there, Dr. J. Richard Gentry, author of "Raising Confident Readers," outlines the top ten reasons to read to your youngster. It may be the best investment you'll ever make in your child's future academic success!

Visit these links for more details: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/raising-readers-writers-and-spellers/201107/the-top-10-reasons-teach-your-baby-or-toddler-read>.


<http://www.aappublications.org/content/early/2015/04/25/aapnews.20150425-4>.

For more information, visit www.Hudson-LiteracyClinic.ca, or email Info@Hudson-LiteracyClinic.ca.

Laura Caprini is a teacher and co-founder of the Hudson Literacy Clinic with teacher Sandra Weir.



Jacques Chagnon
Député de | MNA for Westmount—Saint-Louis



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ASISTA Foundation: Helping dogs help humans

By Wendy Singer



*Stella works for ASISTA's Therapy Program in schools.
(Photo courtesy of Fondation ASISTA)*

Service dogs are known for their ability to assist people with visual impairments and physical disabilities. They provide therapy by building confidence, providing a sense of calm and security, and of course, offering unconditional love.

For the past three years, Laval-based Fondation ASISTA Service Dogs has been training dogs to help provide a happier and healthier life for individuals with autism, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), and psychological issues.

ASISTA's founder, John Agionicolaitis, is only 19 years old, and is studying Animal Health Technology at Vanier College. He loves animals and has volunteered at many organizations that assist dogs since he was 12 years old.

Conscientious beyond his years, Agionicolaitis saw a fault in the current system of animal care and felt he could improve it, and in turn, the life of both dogs and human beings.

In collaboration with the SPCA Laurentides-Labelle in Ste-Agathe-des-Monts, ASISTA rescues dogs that might, otherwise, have been put to sleep. Agionicolaitis and his team train the dogs to respond to certain anxieties and commands. They are then matched with people with autism or PTSD. ASISTA also provides pet therapy in two Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board schools, various centres, and seniors residences.

ASISTA is the first organization in the province to offer services to those who suffer from PTSD. In fact, they are developing a protocol for service dogs for Veterans in collaboration with Veterans Affairs Canada and Université de Laval. "We are training dogs for people who have seen too much," shares Agionicolaitis.

This non-profit organization has gotten off to a tremendous start. Agionicolaitis works hand-in-hand with his parents and a committed Board of Directors that includes two veterinarians, two animal health technicians, two lawyers, educator Nick Primiano, and Sylvie Tardif who is a Ph.D. in biochemical research. With the help of the Centre Vété-

rinaire Laval, ASISTA absorbs all of their dogs' medical expenses. The Laval Police Dog Unit offers screening, and their sponsors Nutrience and Hagen provide food for the dogs.

Agionicolaitis' mother, Solange Barbara, administrator of ASISTA's Board of Directors, has much praise for her son. "Everybody has a gift. John's is the giving of love. When you're doing good, you get good. It's karma."

Agionicolaitis has no problem spending his time growing ASISTA while his peers are busy doing 'teen-focused' activities. "I work hard to make a difference for people and animals. It's a new day every day. ASISTA is a team effort, and I am grateful to everyone who is involved."

ASISTA offers workshops and recreational activities that engage students in the classroom with the use of service dogs. They enable students to practice important life skills while creating special bonds with their canine friends. This include grooming, listening, outdoor activities, sharing, and drawing.

ASISTA's Trainer For a Day! program is ideal for students with special needs, teaching the importance of a routine and schedule



*ASISTA Founder John Agionicolaitis with his mother Solange Barbara and Trio.
(Photo courtesy of Fondation ASISTA)*

at home and at school, increasing empathy, sense of accomplishment, decrease stress levels, increase comfort levels, responsibility and social skills.

For information about ASISTA's services, visit www.asista.ca or contact John at john.agionicolaitis@asista.ca or 514-978-2618.

Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board's SIS Program is expanding in Laval

By Heather Halman, B.Comm. BA., MA, C.E.L.

Many parents of young adults with intellectual disabilities are faced with a decline in services when their children reach 21-years-of-age and are no longer eligible for secondary education. The daunting challenge these parents face is in finding an appropriate program in the local community conducted in English that will build the potential and the autonomy of their young adult.

We place a strong emphasis on the development of the whole student in the Adult Education program at the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board. This is particularly true for our Social Integration Services (SIS) program for adults experiencing adjustment difficulties of a psychological, intellectual, social or physical nature. Our programs' success is highlighted by a personal approach to the needs, abilities and potential of each of our students.

The five-day per week program has 14 fields of study which include the development of domestic, personal and social skills such as shopping, preparing meals, cleaning up, understanding healthy nutrition, as well as using good grooming and hygiene practices. Students learn about banking, how to be safe in traffic and amongst strangers, how to manage their time and personal items, while developing their academic skills according to their potential and their individualized plan. Work skills such as getting to and from work on time, working cooperatively with others, completing a task on time, following directions and accepting supervision, are developed.

Our highly qualified team focuses on building personal, social and academic skills according to a specifically developed individualized transition plan for each student based upon the curriculum of the Quebec

Ministry of Education. In a positive and supportive learning environment, our students learn to use computers, iPads, Smartboards, and other media on a daily basis. They are supported in making presentations, speaking in public, giving back to the community through fundraising and making products for re-sale. Many of our students go on apprenticeships in the local community, working in daycares, seniors' residences and local enterprises, putting their skills to work in a real-world setting.

SIS will be opening a second group in Laval in September 2016 to



*SIS students at CDC Vimont.
(Photo courtesy of SWLSB)*

further serve the needs of our community.

For information contact 450-688-2933 ext. 3141 to make an appointment.

Heather Halman is the director of Adult Education at CDC Vimont/CDC Lachute/ CDC Joliette, Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board.



Inspirations Notebook

Wendy Singer



Chantal Petitclerc is named senator.

Congratulations to **Chantal Petitclerc** on being named as a senator by **Prime Minister Justin Trudeau** and the Liberal government. Petitclerc is the most celebrated track athlete in history, having won gold medals at the Olympics, Paralympics, and Commonwealth games. On March 18, the Paralympian and six other Canadians were named to sit as independents.

In a statement, Trudeau said: “The Senate appointments I have announced today will help advance the important objective to transform the Senate into a less partisan and more independent institution that can perform its fundamental roles in the legislative process more effectively - including the representation of regional and minority interests - by removing the element of partisanship, and ensuring that the interests of Canadians are placed before political allegiances.”

Petitclerc’s obvious concerns are those that are familiar to her as an athlete, a person with a disability, and a woman. But, as she explained in an interview with CBC, she won’t be afraid to move out of her comfort zone to address other issues that are equally as important to Canadian citizens.

Petitclerc is a public speaker, broadcaster and athlete mentor, and Chef de Mission for Team Canada at the upcoming Rio Paralympic Games from September 7 to 18, 2016.



Peter Hall student Bodhi, Alexandra Desbiens, and Bernie Gurberg at Dollar Cinema.

Bernie Gurberg believes that movie going should be accessible to everybody. In 2004 he opened Dollar Cinema in the Decarie Square to make this a reality. Well known to Montrealers, Dollar Cinema offers rock bottom prices on both films and snacks. This makes it a great venue for school field trips, and is often a destination of choice for Peter Hall School.

We stopped by Dollar Cinema on February 24 to meet up with 35 students from Peter Hall. When we arrived, they were settling into their seats with popcorn and drinks, ready to watch *Alvin and The Chipmunks*.

These students are participants in Peter Hall’s Gateway Program, an initiative for students aged 15 to 21 with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Gateway prepares students for their life once they leave Peter Hall by focusing on the development and acquisition of skills that are most relevant for adulthood. The program is divided into three subprograms: Daily Living, Play and Leisure, and Pre-Vocational.

Alexandra Desbiens, vice-principal of Peter Hall School, Côte-Vertu campus, explained that the excursion to Dollar Cinema provided excellent life skill acquisition experiences, from commuting on a city bus and paying bus fare to preparing for the cinema activity, and eating lunch in a public space after the movie.



Tara Flanagan and Aparna Nadig at the McGill Faculty Club in January 2016.

On January 11, stakeholders from the autism community and interested parties gathered at McGill University’s Faculty Club to hear the results of the McGill Transition Support for Adults with Autism Study. Conducted between 2013 and 2015, this intervention study included 34 participants that were randomized into two groups: immediate intervention and delayed intervention control group.

The study, which is registered on ClinicalTrials.gov, was conducted by **Aparna Nadig**, associate professor, McGill School of Communication Sciences and Disorders, and **Tara Flanagan**, associate professor, Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology at McGill University.

With funding from the **Max Bell Foundation**, the curriculum for a small group format transition service for adults with ASD was guided by participants’ self-expressed needs in the domains of social communication, self-determination, and working with others. Importantly, the needs assessment highlighted that participants had diverse and variable needs in these areas, including learning how to deal with change and unexpected situations as well as communication with others.

The launch of the website <http://transition-support-adultsasd.scsd.mcgill.ca/> coincided with the event. It describes the program, features a video showcasing the perspectives of young adults with ASD on their transition into adulthood, and includes links to helpful resources. Interested parties can sign an Action Letter to ask for a mandate for access to services supporting the transition from school to the community for adults with ASD. Stay posted for updates including a full manual and research results.

The 11th edition of *D’un oeil différent* took place at the Écomusée du fier monde & hors-murs from March 2 to March 17. This multidisciplinary cultural event aims to build community awareness for the



Simon Marcotte-Tremblay with Geneviève Guilbault at D’un oeil différent 2016.

inclusion and potential of unrecognized artists, and brought 200 amateur and professional artists together.

The opening night vernissage was packed with visitors and artists who mingled and enjoyed the beautiful works of art that were displayed in every corner of the Écomusée. Performers engaged the crowd with music and comical, charming impromptu demonstrations.

According to **Geneviève Guilbault**, president of the board of D’un oeil différent, recreation technician at CRDI TED de Montréal, and assistant director of La Gang à Rambrou, over 210 artists collaborated on the 150 works on display. 120 of these artists are living with an intellectual disability or autism spectrum disorder.



The Honourable Mike Lake, MP, Peter Gerhardt, and Nathalie Garcin at the Gold Centre's Current Trends in Autism Conference.

The Gold Centre’s Current Trends in Autism Conference: Transition planning and employment for adolescents and adults with an ASD, took place on March 21 and 22.

Peter Gerhardt, Ed.D, executive director of the EPIC School in Paramus, New Jersey, spoke about what individuals need to learn in order to help them navigate their social and employment world, from travel training, public/social, to bathroom/hygiene, and more. Gerhardt dares to cultivate enthusiasm, stating that we need to focus on what people with autism are passionate about.



Dr. David Nicholas, associate professor of Social Work at the University of Calgary, leads multiple studies addressing transitional and vocational challenges, and means to overcome barriers and build opportunity for youth and adults with autism. He discussed how he focuses on setting clear expectations in the workplace, structuring the work environment, and creating meaningful work opportunities.

The Honourable **Mike Lake**, PC, MP, opened the conference with a passionate presentation in which he shared his family's experience. Lake's 19-year-old son Jaden has autism, and until recently, has attended a mainstream school. "By including him, we saw his exceptional talents," shared Lake. Jaden is now doing highly efficient work in a library.

Lake applauded **Nathalie Garcin**, executive director, Gold Centre, and the Gold Centre for being a major part of the national conversation on autism.

The **Sami Fruits Foundation** threw the party of the year at Le Mont Blanc re-



Mackay Centre School receives a cheque in the amount of \$60,000 at the Sami Fruits Sapphire Gala. Pictured are Monique Crevier, Natalie Smith, Dana Strohl, Joanne Charron, Patrizia Ciccarelli, Erin Arkolakis, Laura Telio, Samantha Colatriano, and Kathy Nakashima. (Photo courtesy of Mackay Centre School)

ception centre in Laval on April 2. The theme of Sapphire Gala set a beautiful atmospheric tone, with ambient blue lighting, and the majority of the 570 guests in attendance dressed to the nines in every shade of blue.

The Foundation raised \$125,000, \$60,000 of which will be donated to the Mackay Centre School, \$50,000 to the Special Olympics, and \$15,000 to **Luca Patuelli's** Projet Rad. Many of the school's staff were in attendance, celebrating and supporting the work of Sami Fruits Foundation, which, over the past five years, has donated a total of \$230,000 to the school. These funds

will be dedicated to an adapted playground that will be built at the new Mackay Centre School campus, which is scheduled to open in 2018.

One of the many highlights of the Sapphire Gala was a silent and live auction. One anonymous donor purchased a private loge for 12 for a recent Rihanna concert. In the generous spirit of the event, this winner gave the loge back to the school, giving Mackay teachers the opportunity to enjoy the concert in style.

"We are eternally grateful for all that Sami Fruits has done for the school over the past five years," shared Principal of the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools **Patrizia Ciccarelli**. "We extend our gratitude to **Taleb** and **Lucy Alasmar**, **Flavio Condo**, and **Lucy Pugliese**."



Harriet Sugar Miller with Shelly Christensen at the MADA Community Centre Club ALinK event on April 12.

On April 12, approximately 40 families with young adults with special needs, and 15 professionals who provide support services joined Club ALinK at MADA Community Center for their first conversation regarding *Young adults with special needs: What's next?* Topics on the table included what are your dreams for your child to be happy and independent, and starting a conversation about how we can work together to build community for young adults.

Guests were engaged by speaker **Shelly Christensen**, a disability inclusion consultant from Minneapolis, and author of *Jewish Community Guide to Inclusion of People with Disabilities*. Christensen is the founder and executive director of Inclusion Innovations, which helps communities develop disability inclusion programs, and co-founder of a national network that trains leaders in the field. She is also the parent of an adult child with Asperger syndrome.

Club ALinK is spearheaded by **Helene Donath** and **Harriet Sugar Miller**. "We're hoping to build a social network, with members and community partners, who will lend fa-

cilities and/or their expertise," shares Sugar Miller. "The kids, and we, the parents, as their advocates, must be at the centre of this process." A Sunday program at the Congregation Chevra Kadisha (The Chevra) will begin in May. Visit Club ALinK on Facebook for information.



R.J. Palacio with her book Wonder at the Shaare Zion Congregation on April 11, 2016.

Agence Ometz got right to the heart of the matter on April 11, hosting **R.J. Palacio**, author of the New York Times Bestseller *Wonder*, at the Shaare Zion Congregation. *Wonder* has sold over 1.5 million copies since its publication in 2012, and was Palacio's first novel.

Based in New York City, Palacio wrote *Wonder* after a chance encounter with an extraordinary child in front of an ice cream store made her question her own innate kindness and compassion. The book's main character, August Pullman, was born with a facial deformity, and shows that Auggie is just an ordinary kid, with an extraordinary face.

This free event offered people of all ages the opportunity to discuss the value of compassion and tolerance to children, and that just one act of kindness can make a difference.

Teachers have been reading *Wonder* with students, and it has become a vital part of the curriculum. For more information or to pledge to 'choose kind', visit rjpalacio.com.

On March 31, The Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (RI-MUHC) announced that it will lead an innovative pan-Canadian network named **CHILD-BRIGHT** that aims to improve life outcomes for children with brain-based development disabilities and their families.

The network is one of five nationwide projects that are being funded by the Canadian Institute of Health Research (CIHR) under their initiative Canada's Strategy for Patient Oriented Research (SPOR). Each

network received a \$12.5 million grant over five years from the CIHR that was equally matched by other funding partners.

"We are very excited to launch this ambitious network which reflects our significant contributions and leadership in child health research across Canada," says CHILD-BRIGHT Principal Investigator **Dr. Annette Majnemer**, occupational therapist and senior scientist from the Child Health and Human Development Program at the RI-MUHC, based at the Montreal Children's Hospital of the MUHC, vice-dean of Education at the Faculty of Medicine, and director of the School of Physical & Occupational Therapy at McGill University. "This total investment of \$25 million will allow us to work together and focus on the goal of achieving a brighter future for children with brain-based development disabilities and their families."



Keiko Shikako-Thomas, Dr. Annette Majnemer, and Joanne Charron celebrate Jooy - one of CHILD-BRIGHT's recipient projects.

Approximately 10 to 15 percent of Canadian children suffer from brain-based developmental disabilities (BDD), which include autism, cerebral palsy, and learning disabilities. The research team plans to conduct a series of studies aimed at optimizing brain development, fostering social emotional well-being and the mental health of children and families, and delivering more responsive family-centered services throughout life.

"A key ingredient to the success of CHILD-BRIGHT is the active engagement and participation of patients and families, health-care providers, policymakers and health decision-makers, together with the researchers in all facets of our research program as well as sharing our knowledge and our findings to the right target audiences," shares Dr. Majnemer.

If you have tidbits to share or would like your event featured in the Notebook, contact wendyinspirations@gmail.com.



Tout réapprendre et travailler

Le cheminement inspirant de Madame Rozon

Par Jacinthe Clément

La vie dresse des défis bien différents pour chaque personne et celles-ci décident du chemin à emprunter pour les relever. Madame Rozon a pour sa part choisi de garder la tête bien haute et d'affronter la vie avec courage et détermination.

Mère de deux enfants ayant des problèmes de santé, épouse et travailleuse, elle conciliait autrefois ses différents rôles de vie tout en poursuivant son rêve de faire de la coiffure artistique.

Cette vie active et dynamique bascula suite à un anévrisme. À cela se sont ajoutés des complications de son anévrisme et trois accidents vasculaires cérébraux qui firent plusieurs dommages au cerveau et qui lui laissèrent des séquelles permanentes. Après 10 jours de coma et de nombreuses semaines à l'hôpital pour stabiliser son état de santé, elle fût transférée au centre de réadaptation

Constance Lethbridge. L'équipe l'a appuyée et l'a aidée à tout réapprendre : marcher, écrire, lire, faire à manger et s'orienter. Elle a appris à fonctionner de façon autonome, à fonctionner dans le quotidien ainsi qu'à se réapproprier son ancienne vie.

Portée par l'idée que « tout est possible », elle insista auprès de l'équipe pour tester ses capacités en emploi. Elle obtint donc un stage dans une chaîne pharmaceutique québécoise. Non seulement elle démontra qu'elle était en mesure de travailler selon certaines conditions, mais elle fut embauchée comme commis étalagiste. Cette expérience de travail permit à Madame Rozon de mettre en pratique et d'intégrer les apprentissages réalisés au centre de réadaptation ainsi que de se créer un nouveau réseau social. Malheureusement, après sept ans de service, Madame Rozon perdit son emploi suite une restructuration de l'entreprise.

Optimiste malgré cet événement difficile, elle fit son curriculum vitae et amorça sa recherche d'emploi de façon active en dé-

ployant beaucoup d'énergie. Rapidement, elle s'aperçut que les exigences des emplois trouvés n'étaient pas compatibles avec ses limites personnelles. Découragée, n'ayant plus de ressources apparentes, elle se fit référer aux services de L'ÉTAPE.

Avec l'aide de son conseiller, ses outils de recherche d'emploi furent optimisés et des stratégies d'entrevues élaborées. Après quelques mois d'accompagnement, c'est avec beaucoup de persévérance et grâce à l'aide de son conseiller à L'ÉTAPE qu'elle décrocha un poste dans une entreprise adaptée.

Ce milieu de travail a la particularité d'engager exclusivement des personnes en situation de handicap. Selon les spécificités de l'individu, sa condition de santé, l'emploi est adapté aux capacités. Ainsi, pour Madame Rozon, cela lui permet de rester active dans le marché de l'emploi tout en respectant les indications médicales reçues, s'assurant ainsi d'une relative stabilité de sa condition.



Carol Rozon. (Crédit photo : Mickaël Dulin)

Madame Rozon tente de montrer l'exemple à ses enfants. Pour elle, il a toujours été question « de ne jamais baisser les bras, d'aller toujours plus loin » tout en étant consciente de ses limites. Madame Rozon se sent fière d'être une travailleuse active. Elle continuera certainement à montrer l'exemple à sa famille, à ses petits-enfants ainsi qu'aux gens qui comme nous, à L'ÉTAPE, croiseront sa route.

Jacinthe Clément est une Conseillère au maintien en emploi.

Découvrez une multitude de lieux et commerces accessibles près de chez vous!

Par Catherine Blanchette-Dallaire

Onroule.org (www.onroule.org) est un répertoire web de commerces, lieux publics, activités et logements accessibles. Notre mission est de vous simplifier la vie en diffusant un maximum d'information sur l'accessibilité des commerces et logements de votre quartier.

Notre répertoire de commerces et lieux publics accessibles couvre une multitude de catégories de lieux tels que les dentistes, les magasins de vêtements ou chaussures, les restaurants, les centres sportifs ou même les camps de jours! Notre répertoire de ressources dresse une liste complète d'organismes pouvant vous aider dans la recherche d'emploi, la recherche de logement ou encore la défense de droits. Enfin, notre répertoire de logements adaptés diffuse de l'information sur les logements, condos ou maisons accessibles/adaptés/

adaptables présentement à louer ou à vendre.

Chacune des fiches présente les détails de l'accessibilité en place. Puisque nous croyons que vous êtes la personne la mieux placée pour déterminer si l'accessibilité d'un lieu vous convient ou non, nous affichons l'ensemble des données disponibles. Ainsi, nous répertorions tous les lieux accessibles, qu'ils le soient partiellement ou totalement, afin de répondre à un maximum de besoins et de limitations fonctionnelles.

Le portail est basé sur vos évaluations et vos commentaires. Vous pouvez évaluer (1 à 5) l'accessibilité générale d'un lieu et laisser un commentaire sur votre expérience générale, en fonction de vos propres limitations et capacités. De cette façon, l'utilisateur suivant dispose d'un ensemble varié d'informations sur l'accessibilité du lieu. Lorsque disponible, nous ajoutons égale-

ment une photo de l'entrée et des toilettes.

J'ai créé ce portail après avoir moi-même vécu en fauteuil roulant durant quatre mois, suite à un accident de sport. Mon rêve serait que vous vous appropriiez cette plateforme en évaluant les lieux inscrits et en ajoutant d'autres. Si chacun ajoute trois à quatre lieux accessibles, nous aurons rapidement un vaste répertoire de lieux accessibles, facilitant ainsi la vie de centaines de milliers de personnes à travers la province.

Je n'oublierai jamais le sentiment vécu à une heure du matin, alors que je cherchais désespérément une toilette accessible encore ouverte. Puisse cette plateforme vous faciliter la vie!

Pour l'ajout de lieux, visitez <http://onroule.org/lieux-accessibles/suggestion-usager/>.



Catherine Blanchette-Dallaire. (Crédit photo : Lorange Design Libre)

Catherine Blanchette-Dallaire est la Fondatrice de www.onroule.org.



Maxwell Bitton, l'art d'être unique

Par Emmanuelle Assor

On sait peu de choses sur Maxwell Bitton à part le fait qu'il a 24 ans, qu'il est autiste et que prend fin, en ce moment, sa première résidence au Musée des beaux arts de Montréal.

C'est vers l'âge de 20 ans que ses parents ont découvert qu'il possédait un merveilleux talent. Lors d'un exercice de dessin sur ordinateur, Maxwell a composé un si joli Pinocchio que son professeur de l'école Giant Steps a appelé ses parents pour leur en parler. Le reste, c'est un cheminement rapide vers le succès mais surtout, vers une véritable passion.

Son père, Charles Bitton, explique que la peinture est le mode d'expression préféré de son fils. « Depuis que je lui ai loué un studio, il y peint presque tous les jours et cela le rend heureux » me confie-t-il. Ce à quoi il ajoute : « Maxwell voit les choses à sa façon. Il n'est pas là pour plaire aux autres. Il est pur, innocent, sensible et il a son style à lui. Sa touche, on la reconnaît depuis le premier jour. Pour moi, il est un vrai artiste. C'est aussi mon meilleur ami, une personne que j'adore. »

Son talent indéniable a d'ailleurs tout de suite été remarqué : il y a un an, une exposition en solo a été organisée par Charles, dans une galerie au Vieux Montréal. 60 œuvres, toutes vendues en une vingtaine de minutes, au profit de la Fondation Giant Steps. Maxwell était fier et Charles aussi. « Tous les médias étaient présents au vernissage et deux mois plus tard, le Musée des beaux arts de Montréal m'a contacté. Ensemble, nous avons formé une équipe et je les ai guidés en tant que parent. »

Ainsi Maxwell a exposé, du 16 février au 17 mars 2016, une quarantaine d'œuvres au musée après une formation de sept semaines, dans le cadre de L'Art d'être unique, un programme de résidence permettant à des jeunes adultes vivant avec un trouble du spectre de l'autisme de créer un projet artistique. Pour Charles, ce scénario était plutôt improbable il y a quelques années. « Ce qui arrive actuellement est miraculeux. Je crois vraiment que l'art peut aider les jeunes qui ont des difficultés de communication ou de développement » affirme-t-il.

Ceci étant dit, Charles est surtout préoccupé par le destin des autistes une fois adultes.

« Le gouvernement nous laisse tomber quand nos jeunes atteignent l'âge de 21 ans. Comme parent, on fait quoi à ce moment là? Je suis si content que Maxwell ait trouvé une activité qui lui plaise, l'occupe et le fasse sortir de la maison! Mon fils a un don mais j'aimerais surtout qu'il puisse devenir le porte-parole des autres autistes. Il faut que le monde sache que les autistes ont tous quelque chose à apporter à la société. »

Quels projets d'avenir pour Maxwell? Son père répond avec enthousiasme : « Je voudrais qu'il puisse exposer ses toiles partout à travers le monde. En Europe, en Asie! Qu'un musée de New York l'invite comme artiste en résidence. Mais surtout, mon plus grand rêve, c'est qu'il puisse inspirer d'autres personnes autistes. Ce qui arrive à Maxwell c'est fantastique mais c'est surtout un grand pas pour toute la communauté autiste » conclue-t-il simplement.

Visitez <https://www.mbam.qc.ca/expositions/a-laffiche/maxwell-bitton/>.

<http://www.maxwellbitton.com>.



Maxwell Bitton.
(Crédit photo : Charles Bitton)

Educatrice spécialisée : la vocation avant tout

Par Emmanuelle Assor

Mon amie et voisine, Valérie Jeanneret, est éducatrice spécialisée. Avant de se lancer dans ce métier si particulier, elle était comédienne. Après avoir touché à tout dans le domaine des arts (que ce soit le doublage de voix, la publicité, le théâtre et même le cinéma), elle avoue qu'elle pensait déjà à une possible réorientation de carrière.

Puis vint le fameux tournant, celui de la maternité et la naissance d'un enfant différent.

« Le diagnostic de TED non spécifié est tombé quand mon fils avait deux ans et demi. Ce fut d'abord un choc avec le questionnement habituel - « Qu'est-ce que je n'ai pas fait de bien pendant ma grossesse? » - question sans réponse, puis la recherche de services et l'action. Car Valérie est une femme d'action mais surtout de cœur.

« J'avais décidé de ne pas chercher en vain la cause du trouble de mon enfant. Puis en 2009, j'ai vu une annonce pour intervenante du dîner au Centre François-Michelle à Outremont. Même si je n'avais pas d'expérience professionnelle dans ce domaine, j'avais une expérience bien personnelle par rapport aux enfants aux besoins spéciaux. Très vite, j'ai eu un coup de cœur pour ces élèves. Je voulais les protéger, les rassurer » dit-elle avec sérénité.

Avec cette bienveillance et ouverture d'esprit qui la caractérisent, Valérie a décidé de retourner aux études en 2011 pour être officiellement éducatrice spécialisée.

« On ne naît pas tous avec les mêmes habiletés mais on en a tous. Quand il est bien accompagné, un être humain peut voler de ses propres ailes. Avec des enfants aux besoins particuliers, on ne peut absolument pas être dans la performance. Il faut constamment essayer des choses différentes

et malgré les difficultés, on a toujours des petites victoires à célébrer » me confie-t-elle.

Depuis cette année, Valérie travaille en tant qu'éducatrice spécialisée à l'école Saint-Ambroise, dans une classe TEACCH. Elle y rencontre souvent des parents désemparés et elle est parfois surprise de voir qu'il existe encore des gens qui manquent totalement d'empathie. « Si on commençait par être bienveillant les uns envers les autres, ce serait déjà un début! Acceptons que chacun a son parcours et qu'on a tous le droit à l'erreur! » Comme disait cette citation de la poète Erin Hanson : « What if I fall? Oh, but darling, what if you fly? »

Quand je lui demande comment elle voit l'avenir, Valérie me répond avec cet optimisme que je lui connais si bien : « J'adore ce que je fais et je me sens privilégiée de travailler avec des enfants autistes. Dans la vie, je n'ai pas de regret sauf peut-être celui



Valérie Jeanneret.
de ne pas avoir fait ce métier avant! ».

Emmanuelle Assor est mère d'un enfant de six ans ayant un TSA. Elle est blogueuse pour le Huffington Post et écrit sur l'autisme, un sujet qui lui tient à cœur.



Concussions: Prevention is key

By Cindy Davis

After being cooped up for much of the winter, this is the time of year when many Canadians wake from their hibernation. But as we enjoy our much missed outdoor physical activity, it is important to remember to take the necessary precautions to avoid injury, such as concussions.

According to Brain Injury Canada, 160,000 Canadians sustain traumatic brain injury each year – 30 percent of whom are children and youth, many while participating in sports and other activities. Concussions are a mild form of traumatic brain injury, and are caused by the brain moving within the skull after an impact or hard knock. Though concussions are very common, they are not to be treated lightly, and can have serious lasting effects if not treated properly.

Some of the common signs of concussion can include loss of consciousness, amnesia, headache, and nausea, to name a few. Harry

Zarins, Executive Director of Brain Injury Canada, says that people who have suffered concussions are referred to as ‘survivors’ because they can struggle with lasting disabilities – many of which are not visible. “Sensitivity to bright lights, loud noises, balance issues: there are a multitude of issues that people don’t necessarily see,” says Zarins. “People who have suffered a disability associated with brain injury are trying to move forward but they can be suffering silent disabilities. Society expects them to return to normal, but it has to be a new normal.”

Zarins says it is very important to detect the signs of concussion and not to shrug them off. “Rest is really important to heal,” he says, adding that allowing the brain time to heal following injury can save lives by preventing repeat head injury. In 2013, he notes, Rowan Stringer, an Ottawa high school rugby player, died after ignoring the symptoms of concussion and suffering a second head injury a few days later. Zarins says that multiple concussions can be extremely dangerous and cautions not to take any risks when dealing with a brain injury – no matter how



Kim McDonald Taylor at the Brain Injury Canada Conference 2015 in Montreal.
(Photo courtesy of Brain Injury Canada)

minor you think it is.

Of course, prevention is key and although accidents can always happen, Zarins stresses that there are important steps one can take to minimize the risk. “Practice responsible behaviour in all areas of life: respect the speed limit, follow rules of the road, don’t abuse alcohol.” And when enjoying physical activ-

ity? He adds, “Follow the rules of the game, whatever the sport may be.”

For more information visit www.braininjurycanada.ca.

Cindy Davis is the PR coordinator at the Jewish Public Library as well as a freelance journalist, editor and PR consultant.

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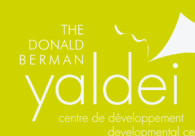
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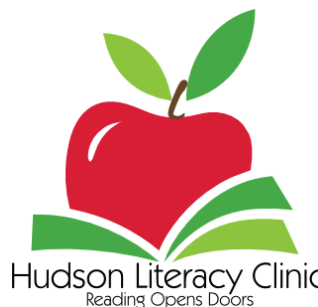
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One of the great challenges we face as a society is ensuring that all Canadians have access to the tools they need to pursue their dreams which is why it is our pleasure to support the entire team at Inspirations whose noble efforts to build bridges of understanding through education have made a real impact within the special needs community!



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Finding the right partner starts with a decision: To them, you will be whole and beautiful

By Jay Jones-Doyle



Jay and Katie in Amsterdam.

Relationships. They can bring us to the height of joy and can equally flatten us mercilessly against the jagged spires of despair. Most people spend their lives oscillating between these two extremes, hoping to gain a foothold in the greener pasture. This is a difficult thing to achieve for any individual, even ones armed with boundless physical and mental prowess, but can seem out of reach for someone who has a disability. But why is this the case? Is this interpretation a true reflection of reality? I'll get to that, but first, a bit of personal history.

I consider myself to be extroverted, confident, attractive, and capable of holding my own in any circumstance – irrespective of having Cerebral Palsy. While that state of mind has held true for many years (taking into account the natural confidence wobbles which are part-and-parcel of the teenage years), I had always held on to something that I considered to be objectively true. I felt that because of my physical limitations, whoever chose to be my partner would necessarily have to accept a trade-off between the positive aspects that I brought to the relationship versus other aspects that an able-bodied partner would bring that I could not

do or could not do as effectively.

This mentality partially fueled my desire to be more emotionally supportive, more caring and affectionate, to become a good cook and to take carpentry and home renovation courses, and to master other aspects of functionally managing day-to-day life such as being able to fix technology and the like. While all of this may seem positive, which objectively it is, in the back of my mind I had secretly framed it as a dowry of sorts. I saw these enhanced capabilities as being my way of offsetting the sacrifice that my girlfriend and someday wife would be making by choosing me. This frame of mind is not healthy, and does not make for a solid foundation for a relationship.

After many years of thinking this way, I have been blessed to date several people who saw me as whole and beautiful. Through being told, and shown, that the physical aspects that I once considered to be undesirable are actually appreciated, loved, and even desired (such as a slightly slower pace of walking), I have finally shed the last vestiges of my troublesome belief structure. I can now move forward with the full confidence that I am perfect for my girlfriend and

that the life that we hope to create together will not be secretly mired by a sense of inadequacy but rather supported by mutual admiration of each other in our entirety.

I write this article from Madrid, where I am currently on the last leg of a three-week journey, also including Paris and Amsterdam. As you can see in this photo, I look happy. And I am. If you believe in yourself, and give yourself the chance to find someone who loves you in all of your glory, you will be too.

Jay Jones-Doyle is currently 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 programme. He holds two advanced degrees and was named one of Quebec's top three graduate students of 2011 as well as Concordia's Outstanding Student of the Year. He sits on the Board of Directors of the Concordia University Alumni Association, is an accomplished motivational speaker, a championship-winning junior hockey coach, the proud father of an 11-year-old boy, and has cerebral palsy. Find out more at www.confidencedrivencoaching.com.

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Jameson Jones-Doyle; BA, MSc

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Participants at a charity hockey tournament pose for a ceremonial puck drop on Saturday April 16, 2016 at Deux-Montagnes's Olympia Arena. From left to right: player Marie-Soleil Bedard, Crestview Elementary Principal Marie-Helen Goyetche, Mayor Denis Martin, head organizer and city councillor Margie Lavallée, teacher and captain of Crestview's team Matthew Bleeker.

Spectators watched nine adult teams compete in the four-on-four games, helping to raise just over \$2,500 to benefit autistic students at Laval's Crestview Elementary. The school has 12 of 21 classes designated for special needs children.

Proceeds from registration fees as well as food, beer and ticket sales went to the cause. Animation and music were provided free of charge by 94.7 Hits FM. It was the first charity hockey event for autism in the area.

"We're very grateful that the organizers thought of us," said Goyetche. "I'd especially like to say a big 'thank you' to Margie Lavallée, Kathy Normoyle and Diane Lavallée for organizing this fundraiser."

Both Goyetche and the organizers are glad the event generated greater awareness for autism within the community.

"I believe that if we keep having this tournament people will learn more about autism," expressed Councillor Lavallée. It is important for people to be informed."





Congrès canadien de la trisomie 21

Canadian Down Syndrome Conference

Par Sarah-Elizabeth Meehan

Cette année, le Regroupement pour la Trisomie 21 (RT21) est fier d'accueillir la 29^e édition du Congrès canadien de la trisomie 21, qui se tiendra à l'hôtel Delta de Montréal, du 27 au 29 mai 2016. Organisé chaque année par la

Société canadienne du syndrome de Down (CDSS), en partenariat avec différents organismes, cet événement agit comme plateforme de partage et de découverte de développements innovateurs et d'informations provenant de spécialistes de divers milieux reliés à la trisomie 21. Nous parlons de domaines aussi variés que la



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Conference attendees Paul, Will, Olivia and Nicholas at the 2015 Down Syndrome Conference in Edmonton. (Photo credit, Shannon Thomas)

santé, la recherche, l'éducation, la défense des droits et bien plus. Les participants pourront assister à des conférences et des présentations variées sur des thèmes comme l'inclusion, le support familial, la qualité de vie, l'intervention précoce, etc. Lors de ces trois jours, nous soulignerons et célébrerons les accomplissements des personnes vivant avec la trisomie 21 de partout à travers le monde.

Le RT21 est un organisme à but non lucratif ayant pour mission de favoriser le plein développement des personnes ayant une trisomie 21, promouvoir leur contribution au sein de la société et défendre leurs droits, en plus de soutenir les familles, les proches aidants et les professionnels qui les entourent. Pour ce faire, le RT21 a développé de nombreux services et une multitude d'activités offerts aux familles-membres depuis près de 30 ans.

Each year, the Canadian Down Syndrome Society (CDSS) National Conference acts as a platform to share cutting-edge developments and information from specialists in their respective fields, as it relates to Down syndrome. Information in the fields of medical, health, social, research, education and advocacy programs will be shared with the members of the community through ple-

nary/keynote addresses, state-of-the-art reviews, panel discussions and presentations. Pertinent issues such as full inclusion, quality of life, family support, early intervention and more will be discussed. The accomplishment of people with Down syndrome worldwide will be highlighted and celebrated during this annual three-day event.

The CDSS is a national non-profit organization providing information, advocacy and education about Down syndrome. The CDSS supports self-advocates, parents and families through all stages of life. Its mission is to empower Canadians with Down syndrome and their families, raise awareness, and provide information on Down syndrome through the prenatal, early childhood, school years, adulthood, and retirement stages of life.

For information about the Canadian Down Syndrome Conference, visit cdss.ca.

Pour plus d'information sur le Regroupement pour la Trisomie 21, visitez le.trisomie.qc.ca.

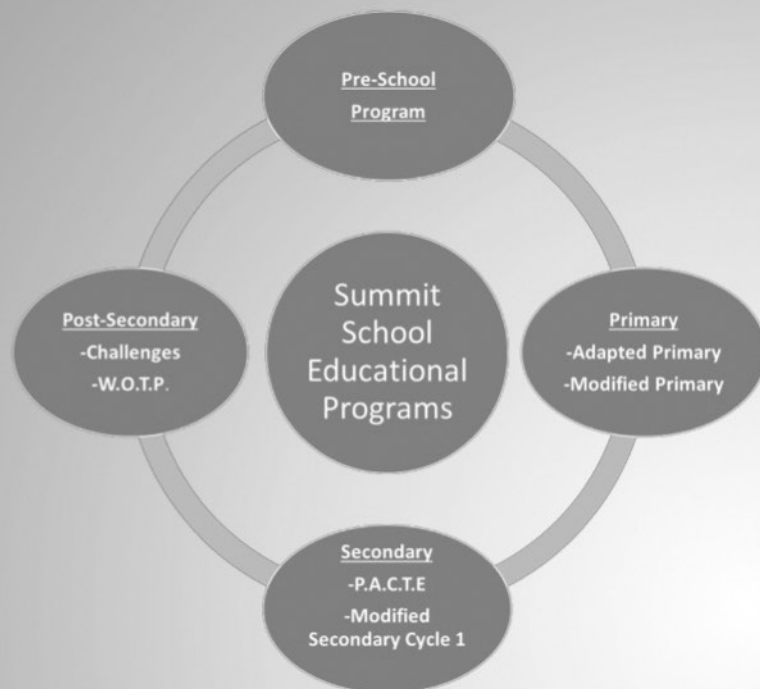
Sarah-Elizabeth Meehan is the communications coordinator for the RT21.



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Montreal community rallies to raise awareness, funds for upcoming Autism Speaks Canada walk

By Valentina Basilicata

Autism Speaks Canada's trademark fundraising event kicks off on Sunday, June 5, 2016, in Montreal at the McGill University Tomlinson Fieldhouse. Since 2011, the three-kilometer walk has been powered by an eclectic group of volunteers coming together to raise awareness and generate dollars for research, advocacy initiatives and community services.

"It's a family event where everyone is welcome. Individuals with autism are valued and are the centerpiece of this walk," said this year's honorary walk chair Maude Watier. As chair, 21-year-old Watier represents the voice of the autism community.

Inspired by her younger cousin who has au-

tism, Watier is completing her Bachelor of Arts in the field of education. She aspires to teach students with special needs. "He is the one who helped me discover how incredible it is to work with autistic children," she revealed.

Despite a busy academic schedule and part-time work as a shadow at a local summer camp, Watier has been a dedicated walk participant since 2013. She sets her fundraising goal at \$1,000 each year, organizing local charity events like spaghetti suppers to reach her target.

"The funds are really important because there is a lot of research that still needs to be done, and families need the support that the funds offer," she highlighted.

Krista Leitham, regional walk manager,

considers Watier a "top leader" in the community. "Her actions exemplify her commitment," said Leitham. "Maude's own family, teaching and volunteer experiences with autism drive her spirit."

Alison Oliver, 44, is also a dedicated supporter and former walk chair. This West Island mom of two young boys who have autism celebrated her 40th birthday at the walk in 2011. "It was a no-brainer to turn my 40th birthday into a pay-it-forward event for a charity that touched so close to home," recalled Oliver. "I asked people to walk with us and make donations rather than buy birthday gifts. That year we raised over \$10,000."

Her large team - now named The Young Troopers in honor of her sons - raises between \$4,000 and \$12,000 each year.

"I raise funds for Autism Speaks Canada because they fund research, family services and advocacy across the country," Oliver explained.

Oliver typically has between 30 and 60 individuals walking with her. They include family, friends, children, ABA (Applied Behaviour Analysis) therapists and co-workers. "With so many people coming back year after year and raising so much money, I really enjoy spending time with everyone. It's a great way to connect with the community."

This year's Montreal event includes a yoga warm-up led by Monica Merleau, 49, from the new SHEVAYA Wellness Centre. "My specialty is special needs yoga," Merleau specified. Also a teacher at Summit School and mother to a daughter with Down syndrome, Merleau is proud to be partaking in her second walk.

Local grant recipients awarded \$133,000

Thanks to passionate community members and donors like Watier, Oliver and Merleau, Autism Speaks Canada has made a significant impact in the Montreal area in recent years.

Grant money from 2015 helped fund a bilingual first responders training program to the tune of \$65,000. Giant Steps School and its Resource and Training Centre, in part-



Monica Merleau with her daughter Jasmine at the Montreal Autism Speaks Canada walk. (Photo credit, Kevin Raftery of PCJ Sport Photography)

nership with the City of Laval, developed a comprehensive ASD First Responder Training Program for emergency services workers. They also have plans for a voluntary registry of people with autism that personnel can reference during an intervention. (To read more about this initiative, read Nick Katalifos' editorial on page 4 of this edition of Inspirations).

A second \$68,000 collaborative grant was awarded to MUHC McGill University Health Center, Montreal Children's Hospital, Douglas Mental Health University Institution, CCIFA and the World Health Organization to fund a program called Parent Support for Linguistically and Culturally Diverse Communities.

Since 2010, 16 Quebec community organizations servicing the ASD population have received a total of \$450,750 in grant money.

Registration for the walk is still open. Visit <http://support.autismspeaks.ca> to donate or register.

Join or support Team Inspirations. Visit our page on the Autism Speaks website!

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



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LIVE: Learning in a vocational environment

By Lisa Dawes

R.E.A.C.H., Realistic Educational Alternatives for Children with Handicaps, is an English elementary and high school within the Riverside School Board dedicated to serving students aged six to 21 with special needs such as pervasive development delays, autism, and Down syndrome.

Over the last few years, one of the goals at R.E.A.C.H. has been to create an off-site community work environment to address the needs of students that have been unable to participate in local business work stage placements due to their higher needs in communication and independence.

With this goal in mind, we applied and received a research grant from the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports, in partnership with McGill University. This has allowed us to provide wonderful opportunities for our students. Although the Action Research aspect of this project will conclude in June 2016, the project has taken on its own life and is sustainable and profitable.

The program addresses the needs of stu-

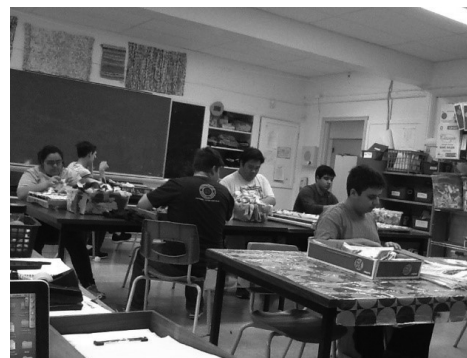


R.E.A.C.H. student showing a completed rug. (Photo courtesy of R.E.A.C.H. School)

dents who are underserved as a result of their higher need for guidance and supervision. Their lack of autonomy hinders their access to participating within the community. The goal is that the students will be able to transfer the skills they learn into a community-based work environment, emulating the type of employment they may seek in their adult lives. We also help them become productive citizens, giving them a sense of belonging and purpose.

Our initiatives include:

Milk Bags to Mats utilizes multiple steps to teach our students a variety of fine and



Students working in the workshop. (Photo courtesy of R.E.A.C.H. School)

gross motor skills, functional skills, and behaviours compatible with the expectations of a work environment. Many of our high school students have learned to weave, which requires hand-eye coordination. Using donated milk bags, the students weave them into versatile plastic mats with many possible functional uses such as sleeping pads, picnic mats, or gardening.

Rags to Rugs/placemats utilizes many of the same skills learned from the Milk Bag Mat project. These skills are transferred, and a few new skills are added. Using donated bed sheets, the students weave the strips of material into beautiful rugs or placemats.



R.E.A.C.H. student showing a completed rug. (Photo courtesy of R.E.A.C.H. School)

Recently we have begun to create pillow covers and bags.

Students show pride in their work and their ability to complete their own creation. Perhaps the greatest product of our work environment is the abundance of self-esteem growing in our students as a result of this endeavor.

For information see our sway at <https://sway.com/PQCL6ES8eAcdDAqV> or <https://www.facebook.com/Reach-School-395123913979596/>.

Lisa Dawes is the life skills/workshop teacher at R.E.A.C.H. School.

Coping with crisis: A parent's mini-guide

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

There seems to be an increase in tragic events in our world today. As adults, we must find ways to keep our emotions in check and not get carried away by our fears. But, what about our children and their reactions to these situations? What should we be telling them? What if they are very young or if they have special needs? What do we do as parents?

Although we quite rightly assume all children are vulnerable and we must protect them at all costs, it is important to remember that not all children react the same way, or require the same interventions. Some children may regress in the aftermath of a crisis and behave in ways similar to a much younger child, whereas others may react in the same way as their caregivers or peers. Some children may not react at all. Our response to our children must be guided by their reactions, be developmentally appropriate, and relate to their level of readiness

to accept the information.

- Brief, fact-based information goes a long way in normalizing situations and reducing the distress created by the crisis. It is also important to bear in mind that most children interpret information very literally.
- Speak using the child's level of language that is developmentally appropriate for that child. Use the vocabulary they use. For some the use of pictures may be helpful to facilitate understanding.
- Highlight the help that is being directed to those in crisis. Even in very drastic situations there will always be help. With media coverage point out all of the people that are there to help: the firefighters, police officers, ambulances or civilians that lend a hand.
- Return to regular routines as they offer predictability and structure on what to

focus and help us to move forward from the tragedy.

- Limit the amount of time watching the events on various media forums. Sometimes media coverage can really focus on the negative for hours or even days later – forcing us to relive the tragic event over and over. However, do not avoid the situation completely. Learning to cope with various events is a helpful coping tool.
- Let the child direct you. It is best to allow your child to direct you in what and how much they want to learn about the event. Do not avoid the topic either, if it is something that they bring up. If they are interested or worried, they may look to other less reliable sources for information.
- Be alert to any changes in behaviour (i.e. changes in eating, sleeping, mood). If these behaviours persist for more than two weeks, it may be time to seek out additional support.
- Children feel better when they DO

something. Have them actively perform some activity to help them cope, such as writing a letter or collecting clothing to donate, or any other volunteer work.

- For specific interventions for children that have particular needs or if a child continues to experience difficulty coping with a tragedy, please seek professional support (e.g., psychologist).

When there is a tragic event, the main role that a parent or caregiver can take is to provide security, safety, and decrease feelings of helplessness and fear. Children must be reassured that whatever the event, there is always someone there to help, and the situation will pass. Responding calmly and consistently to whatever behaviours that children may present, or questions they may ask, will go a long way to helping them feel safe and secure.

Janet Perlis and Despina Vassiliou are both school psychologists, members of the Mental Health Resource Centre, and certified PREPaRE trainers (for school crisis prevention and intervention).



Friendship social skills group for parents at WIAIH

By Franca Kesic

The friendship social skills group meets on the last Tuesday of every month from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m. at 111 Donegani in Pointe Claire. Offering support and guidance to parents and caregivers, it is conducted following *The Science of Making Friends*, a book by Elizabeth Laugeson. The book offers concrete steps on how to achieve the skills that lead toward meeting and maintaining friendships for teens and young adults with social challenges. There is no cost and no commitment, however it is asked that you become a member of WIAIH prior to attending if you are not one already.

Registration is required. Call Franca at 514-694-7090 #214 or email assistance@wiaih.qc.ca to register or for more information.

Franca Kesic is the coordinator, Community & Volunteer Relations at WIAIH.

WIAIH is one of the largest community organizations in the Greater Montreal area, offering a broad range of services to over 500 members, including recreational activities, a residence for adults living with intellectual handicaps, support groups for parents, daycare integration, a babysitter referral program, an extensive and specialized resource library, information sessions, and the Pat Roberts Developmental Centre, a preschool for children who have developmental issues such as delays, syndromes or autism (diagnosed or not). Last year, WIAIH, through its services, provided over 200,000 hours of recreational services to its member families, and made over 1,400 recreational opportunities possible for its participating members.

The Angelman Respite Centre opens in Pierrefonds

By Franca Kesic

WIAIH is happy to announce the opening of the Angelman Respite Centre in Pierrefonds. This centre provides families with a well-deserved break while providing participants with adapted programming and many opportunities for socialization and stimulation. Respite is available for children, teens and adults who have an intellectual disability or autism.

This centre is the result of a partnership between the Angelman Foundation and WIAIH. Tours for potential guests and their families are currently being offered. Respite is available in evening, daytime, and weekend blocks. Respite weekends are offered by age group. This service is available to the entire community of individuals who have intellectual disabilities or autism.

After years of planning, preparing and fundraising, The Angelman Centre now has a fully equipped sensory room to offer guests. This sensory room is outfitted with a bubble tube, infinity tunnel, fiberoptics, a waterbed, a projector and much more. The Centre administrators are eager to put this room to good use, and are confident that their guests will greatly benefit from it, along with everything that the facility and team has to offer.

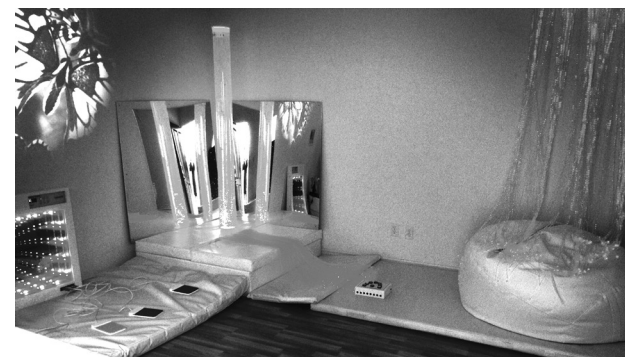
For more information, costs, or to book a tour please contact the program coordinator, Alison Rollins at 514-316-9017 #101 or angelman@wiaih.qc.ca. For information about the Angelman Foundation visit http://www.angelman.ca/angelman_foundation.html.



The pool at the Angelman Respite Centre. (Photo courtesy of WIAIH)



The Angelman Respite Centre opens in Pierrefonds. (Photo courtesy of WIAIH)



The sensory room at the Angelman Respite Centre. (Photo courtesy of WIAIH)

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The RehabMaLL: Making Alexis Nihon Plaza accessible and inclusive

By Dr. Bonnie Swaine, Dr. Eva Kehayia, Delphine Labbé and Cassandra Fehr



Training for shopping done in virtual reality at the mall.
(Photo courtesy of the the RehabMaLL)

In 2011, with support from Le Fonds de recherche du Québec-Santé (FRQS), the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Rehabilitation of Greater Montreal (CRIR) and Cominar REIT (the owner of a Montreal urban shopping mall in need of renovations) started the Rehabilitation Living Lab in the Mall (RehabMaLL). The RehabMaLL aims to create a more accessible and inclusive physical and social environment for everyone, especially persons with physical disabilities affecting one's mobility, hearing, sight or communication.

Given the growing need for more accessible environments, our research encompasses three main objectives: to identify the physical and social obstacles and facilitators met by those who interact within a mall environment; to develop technology and interventions to facilitate social participation and inclusion for persons with physical disabilities and finally, implement and evaluate the impact of such technology and interventions.

Often referred to as an "Open innovative ecosystem," the Living Lab is a methodol-

ogy and environment that focuses on experimentation and co-creation in real life environments, whereby all involved stakeholders seek innovative solutions, new products and/or services. The Alexis Nihon shopping mall is the location of our Living Lab.

In the early years of the RehabMaLL, researchers identified the environmental obstacles, as well as facilitators within Alexis Nihon. Throughout this process, the results were continuously transmitted to Cominar REIT, thus inspiring and contributing to the mall's ongoing renovations.

As a result of this collaborative effort, Alexis Nihon now has two additional ramps at its entrances, a centrally located panoramic elevator large enough to fit three wheelchairs, newly adapted washroom facilities and new lighting and flooring. In addition, ongoing research projects have developed and implemented innovative technology and assistive devices, including an intelligent power wheelchair, audible pointers and specialized vision glasses that facilitate navigation.

Forging a new path: Collaboration to widen access in post-secondary education

By Roberta Thomson

Recently, there have been some exciting and important developments in Montreal's post-secondary settings.

A unique three-year project which began in late 2013 is creating a bilingual website aimed to support faculty in CEGEP and University in their pedagogical approach to curriculum, through the use of the Universal Design for Learning Framework (UDL).

The UDL framework originated from the notion of Universal Design (UD) in architecture. UD proposes that it is better and more efficient to proactively plan for the needs of the variety of people who might use a potential structure. The design then reduces costly retrofitting of less inclusive accommodations for persons whose needs were not initially planned for, such as a ramp built onto the back of an older building. The analogy, when applied to learning environments, means that curriculum is designed from the start, by envisioning the variability of potential students within a course.

The collaborative endeavor between Centennial, Dawson, John Abbott and Marianopolis colleges, and McGill University is forging a new path to create learning environments that respond to the increasing diversity of students in current post-secondary settings, such as age, gender, culture, ethnicity, learning preferences, first language, and abilities. This Quebec funded undertaking has helped uncover the barriers perceived

and experienced by faculty in relation to using UDL in their pedagogy.

Through 77 interviews with faculty spanning over 20 disciplines, the researchers of the project have gained insight into faculty perceptions, the barriers students are encountering in their current learning environments, as well as the various challenges and facilitators for faculty in designing and implementing UDL into their curriculums as student diversity increases.

The culmination of this project is the creation of an accessible toolkit (in the form of a website) that will encourage and inspire post-secondary teachers to use and further their practice with UDL in their curriculum design. Through offering their students multiple and flexible representational forms of the course concepts, multiple means to engage with the material and to show what they have learned, it is anticipated that students will experience fewer barriers as they interact with their learning environments, thereby meeting their true potential.

Look forward to exploring the website www.alludl.ca in October 2016.

Roberta Thomson is the project coordinator for the UDL Faculty/Toolkit and course instructor – McGill University/LaSalle College. For information, email roberta.thomson2@mcgill.ca.

all UDL UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

CRIR researchers together with their Israeli collaborators from Haifa University have also mapped a section of the shopping mall and recreated it in a virtual reality model, allowing people to relearn how to navigate in complex environments. Looking at issues pertaining to social inclusion, some studies proceeded to implement and evaluate the impact of a sensitization training program on mall staff regarding interactions with disabled shoppers.

Our Living Lab is the first of its kind and offers a successful exemplary model, inspiring other research labs worldwide and rais-

ing awareness about disability. This project was possible due to the synergistic collaboration of researchers, healthcare providers, community organizations, public and private partners and the public.

For information about RehabMaLL, visit <http://www.crir-livinglabvivant.com/index.html>.

Dr. Bonnie Swaine and Dr. Eva Kehayia are the scientific leaders, and Delphine Labbé and Cassandra Fehr are the project managers of RehabMaLL.



Pam Schuller: On Tourette syndrome, comedy, and inclusive communities

By Elaine Cohen

The Special Needs Working Group (SNWG) of Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom, with the support of a grant from the Miriam Foundation, celebrated Jewish Disability Awareness Month with an enlightening Shabbat weekend on February 19 and 20, 2016. The community-at-large was invited to participate in Friday night services and listen to Scholar-in-Residence Pamela Schuller deliver the sermon. An internationally renowned inclusion advocate, Schuller is the Regional Director of Youth Engagement for the Union for Reform Judaism (URJ) based in New York. Schuller holds a BA in Psychology and Youth Outreach and an MA in Child Advocacy and Public Policy.

In addition to her academic prowess, Schuller is a stand-up comedian and has appeared in clubs throughout North America. Sharing her story *What Makes Me Tic* on Friday evening, Schuller laced her empowering talk with humour. However, her daily life from third to ninth grade, was no laughing matter. Schuller was diagnosed with Tourette syn-

drome at the age of eight, and relates how she was shunned at school and excluded from her congregation. Her experiences spurred her mission in life to challenge communities to recognize differences and to build more inclusive communities.

“We’ve got to look at our communities as a ‘we,’ where everyone is welcomed and engaged,” she points out, alluding to how her disability enabled her to see outside the box.

Tourette’s is a chronic neurological disorder characterized by involuntary tics and vocalizations. Sometimes, as in Schuller’s case, uttering obscenities is another involuntary component. Schuller, 30, faces fewer hurdles as an adult but in her youth, she sustained one of the most critical cases in America with life-threatening injuries.

Fortunately, her life improved at a boarding school that broached a creative educational approach and adapted to individual differences. When students were asked to list things they liked to do, Schuller could not think of any. However, the astute staff discovered her facility with words and humour.

They praised and posted her poetry, and she instantly found her niche when she attended an improv workshop.

Schuller relates that not all communities excluded her. For example, when her tics simulated the sound of a metronome during a math class, the teacher integrated this into a class project. She commends Goldman Union Camp Institute in Zionville, Indiana, for taking time to listen, encourage self-expression and restore her faith in Judaism. For eight summers prior to joining URJ, Schuller worked with youth at the camp. “I sat with third graders and we discussed our differences.”

Schuller summed up her prototype. “As I see it, eye level is 4’7” and barking without provocation is an entertaining part of my day... Everybody has a fence in their brain and part of my fence is missing.” Schuller is grateful for her training in improv theatre, where the mantra is “yes, and”, and positive solutions are the norm. The congregants appreciated Schuller’s comical overtones, when describing Moses, who despite a disability, led his people out of Egypt.



Inclusion advocate Pamela Schuller engages the community in a weekend of discussions at Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom during Jewish Disabilities Awareness Month.
(Photo courtesy of Pamela Schuller)

Registering for access services in college: A focus on immigrant students with disabilities

By Christine Vo and Evelyne Marcil

Transition from high school to college can be stressful for everyone, but especially for students with disabilities. However, many students adapt and flourish in their new academic environment. The challenge is to assist those who struggle in college.

An Adaptech Research Network study found that, in general, students are satisfied with college life. Surprisingly, students with disabilities who had registered for disability-related services at their college’s access center were the ones most satisfied with their college experience. College access centers ensure that students’ needs are met and that essential accommodations are in place. At different colleges these can include preferential registration, extended time for exams and assignments, and note-takers. Ranking second in satisfaction with college life were

the students without disabilities. Students with disabilities who had not registered for access services at their college reported the lowest satisfaction with college life.

The goal is for all students to enjoy their time in college and to learn and grow from it. Who are these students with disabilities that do not register for campus-based disability-related services? How can they be assisted?

A partial answer to this question is provided by another Adaptech Research Network study. Here it was found that immigrant students were less likely to report having a disability than Canadian-born students and, thus, less likely to register with their college’s access center. Since registration for services is an important contributor to satisfaction with college life, it is necessary to make sure immigrant students with special needs register.

There are many reasons why few immigrant students with disabilities declare a disability. Disabilities as taboo is one reason that immigrant students may not seek assistance. In some cultures, a label related to disabilities is seen in a negative light. Others believe taking any action that makes someone “stand out” should be avoided. Some immigrant students may deny having a disability to prevent being a hindrance to their family. Another reason for not registering for access services is lack of knowledge about disabilities and available services. For example, a disability might be perceived as simply difficulty integrating into a new culture or environment. A disability might also be seen as a permanent sentence - without hope.

There are several ways to help immigrant students with disabilities register with their college’s access center. One possibility is to have an interpreter present if language is an issue. Another method is to be careful with word choice when informing immigrant stu-

dents - or their parents - about the possibility of a disability. Instead of opening the conversation with the topic of disability, talking about unusual behaviours and difficulties, and services available to assist students would be preferable.

Making sure that all students, including immigrants with disabilities, feel comfortable and satisfied with their college experience is an ambitious but essential goal.

Christine Vo is a research assistant at Adaptech Research Network and student at Dawson College. Evelyne Marcil is a research assistant at Adaptech Research Network and a professor at Dawson College. Other contributors include Mary Jorgensen, research associate at Adaptech Research Network and at CRISPESH, and Catherine Fichten, co-director of Adaptech Research Network and a professor at Dawson College.



Could I have it too? Parents of children with ADHD

By Lynda Hoffman

Parents often chuckle when they bring their adolescents to me for coaching saying, "I think I probably have it too!" The chances are they may be right if they have a child with an ADHD diagnosis, especially if they miss appointments, have difficulty getting along with family or co-workers, and managing their finances. In fact, it is well established in scientific literature that genes play a role in 76 percent of the cases of ADHD. If ADHD tends to run in families, why is it that so few adults are aware they have this condition? The Centre for ADHD Awareness, Canada (CADDAC) reports that upwards of 90 percent of adults with ADHD do not receive treatment due

to a lack of diagnosis and access to knowledgeable physicians.

Is it important for parents to seek treatment for their own ADHD? If Mom or Dad already struggles with organization, it is very challenging to provide the consistent structure needed when parenting children and adolescents with ADHD. In fact, research by Dr. Russell Barkley Ph.D., noted neuropsychologist and author of *Taking Charge of ADHD: The Complete Authoritative Guide for Parents* notes that when parents are treated, they are better able to learn the skills required to support their child.

Parenting a child who does not come when called, or put on his coat when asked, or complete his homework independently, re-

quires tremendous amounts of patience. Parents need to understand the child's behavior and be able to manage their own feelings of frustration without erupting into unhelpful threats. For any parent, these would be trying situations. For a parent with ADHD, this can feel truly defeating.

Beyond parenting challenges, adults with undiagnosed ADHD may also miss deadlines, lose track of documents and dates, have trouble concentrating, and feel overwhelmed. Sometimes this leads to a sense of being a failure.

The most validated treatment approach for adult ADHD is multi-pronged. A full assessment by a neuropsychologist, visits with a

physician for medication, and working with a coach to improve executive skills, can collectively result in the significant shifts clients are looking for. Therapists are a helpful addition to this team approach when depression co-occurs with the ADHD.

When treatment is successful, clients report, "I never knew what it felt like to focus before. I just do what I have to do without having to make myself." "How did I ever live my life without it?" Best of all, "I am now accountable to myself." And isn't that what all of us want?

Lynda Hoffman is a coach at Medipsy ADHD Clinic.

Discover accessibility in your community with just a few clicks

By Catherine Blanchette-Dallaire

OnRoule.org (www.onroule.org) is a web directory of accessible businesses, locations, resources, activities and rentals / housing. Our mission is to simplify your life while providing you with as much information about accessibility of locations near you as possible.

Our business and location directory includes various categories such as dentists, clothing stores, restaurants, sports centers and even

accessible day care centers. Our resources directory lists multiple organizations that work in the field of employment, housing or rights defense. Our rental / housing directory shows accessible, adapted, and adaptable apartments, houses or condo for rent or sale.

In each file, you will find details about on-site accessibility. We believe that you are the best judge to determine if a location is accessible for you or not. We arm you with all of the information we have in hopes that you will be equipped to make a sound decision about the location in question. We list

all locations, whether they are partially or totally accessible, in order to meet a maximum of accessibility needs and requirements.

This portal is based on your feedback and comments. You can evaluate the general accessibility level of each location, and leave a comment about how accessible it was for you. This way, the next user will have insight about the accessibility of the location in question. We also feature



photos of the location's entrance and bathroom when available.

I created this portal after living in a wheelchair for four months due to a sports accident. My greatest wish is that you make this portal your own, contribute to the directory by adding accessible locations that you already know. If everyone adds three or four locations, then we will have an amazing portrait of the accessibility of our communities, and we will help tens of thousands of people across the province of Quebec.

I never forgot the feeling I had when, at one o'clock in the morning, I was desperately looking for an accessible bathroom. May this platform make your life easier.

To make a recommendation visit <http://onroule.org/en/accessible-locations/users-recommandation/>.

Catherine Blanchette-Dallaire is the founder of www.onroule.org/en.

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Inspirational Book Review



By Stuart Nulman

The Will To Live by Nechama Surik (AuthorHouse, \$32)

At the offset, Nechama Surik, an Israeli-born Registered Nursing Assistant from Montreal who also teaches at the Shadd Health & Business Centre, wrote *The Will To Live* originally as a private journal of her father Meir's miraculous, yet painful recovery from a near-fatal car accident back in 2000, and never intended to have it published in book form for the public to read.

"However, after long consideration, I began to think of how my family's story and the heroism of my mom and dad could inspire others facing similar difficulties," she writes in the book's acknowledgments section.

The ordeal for the Surik family began on the morning of August 9, 2000. Meir Surik, a Holocaust survivor who fought with the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) during the first Arab-Israeli War in 1948, was involved in a serious car accident that left him with leg fractures, multiple fractures on both sides of his pelvis, as well as fractured ribs that

were causing respiratory distress, which had him hooked up to a respirator as a result. Although the situation with Meir's recovery over the next several months would be precarious at best (and was exacerbated when one of his fractured legs ended up being amputated), the entire Surik family banded together not only to offer emotional and spiritual support but also to get the proper information regarding his progress, so that they would know what to do next to make sure that his recovery was on the right track.

Although Surik's book does not touch on the subject of having a family member with special needs, what she and her entire family endured throughout Meir's long, difficult recovery (and his eventual rehabilitation as a result of losing his leg, especially learning how to walk with a prosthetic leg and rebuilding parts of his condo to accommodate such new drastic lifestyle changes), can echo of how a person with special needs – and what it takes to make sure that the person in question gets the best care and ser-

vices available – can have an emotional and psychological effect on every family member and relative in question. Basically, when an individual suffers any kind of trauma, the entire family suffers that trauma with them in various ways. She credits her parents' strong sense of survival that guided them through nearly 50 years of marriage, and saw them through the State of Israel's turbulent formative years, which played a major role in aiding them to a complete recovery.

Surik takes the reader on this rollercoaster journey of recovery every step of the way, from the accident, to the medical setbacks and positive developments, to the many tears that were shed in joy and frustration, to the eventual joyous family celebration in 2007 that not only marked Meir and Frida Surik's 50th wedding anniversary, but also how far Meir has come physically and mentally. It was on this occasion where she presented the original manuscript of this book to her father.



Nechama Surik.
(Photo courtesy of Nechama Surik)

"It is a story about my mom and dad, two heroes," she writes. "A love-story in which their will to live surpassed every obstacle in the way."

About Nechama Surik and The Better Hearing Program

By Wendy Singer

Nechama Surik is deaf, and initially refused to wear hearing aids to avoid what she felt was a stigma associated with deafness. Born in Israel, she wanted to serve in the Army when she turned 18 like everybody else. This would not have been possible without the use of hearing aids. Now, Surik uses hearing aids and doesn't know how she managed without them. She later moved to Canada and became a health care professional.

In her position at the Donald Berman Maimonides Geriatric Center, Surik realized that her colleagues were not trained to help patients with their hearing aids, and that most were incorrectly installed or maintained. This subsequently led to high costs, poor quality of life, and incorrect diagnoses of dementia and other issues.

Determined to help, Surik developed The Nechama Surik Better Hearing Program with the support of Lucie Tremblay, who was the director of nursing and clinical services at Maimonides at the time. The program is now a province-wide initiative run under the supervision of Surik and the Quebec government.

Surik and her husband, concert pianist/composer Edwin Orion Brownell, provide home visits to help people who need assistance with hearing devices. This is a free service which comes "from the heart to your ear." It allows people who cannot afford to replace malfunctioning devices to maintain their standard of life by using donated aids which can be recycled at a much lower cost than full replacement.

For more information, or to donate hearing aids, contact nechamasurik@gmail.com.

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Spring Awakening embraces ASL in choreography

By Alexandra Cohen

A groundbreaking production of the musical *Spring Awakening* returned to the Broadway stage in the fall for a limited run in New York City, but this was no ordinary musical revival: it was presented simultaneously in both English and American Sign Language.

The original production was on Broadway in 2006, winning eight Tony Awards and launching the careers of current television and Broadway icons Lea Michele and Jonathan Groff. *Spring Awakening* is a risqué rock musical centered on teenagers in late-19th century Germany coming of age while discovering their inner sexuality.

This more recent production, featuring Oscar winner Marlee Matlin and Emmy winner Camryn Manheim, first gained its wings in California when Deaf West Theatre, a group who also brought the musical *Big River* to Broadway in 2003, developed the idea. Rather than using a typical casting format, Deaf West used two different people in the same role. One actor, deaf, would sign the words, and another, hearing, would speak and sing them aloud, often also playing instruments, making the show accessible to all.

Not only was the casting of deaf actors a defining moment in terms of diversity in the theatre, but *Spring Awakening* is also the first Broadway musical with an actor in a wheelchair. Ali Stroker, a talented performer who has been paralyzed from the waist down since a car accident at age two, said, "I never saw anyone in a chair on Broadway," adding, "I had this dream, and I wanted to make it happen."

Thankfully, this exciting production did not go unnoticed. It was critically acclaimed upon opening, with particular praise for its direction and the creative incorporation of ASL in the choreography.

"[Deaf actors] are the most expressive, open, beautiful performers to watch because they spend so much of their life expressing themselves," choreographer Spencer Liff explained to the Hollywood Reporter. He also explained that to keep choreography in sync, deaf actors were given cues from the hearing actors and through lighting changes; small details that the audience wouldn't notice.

The cast was also recently invited to perform at the White House for an event called Americans with Disabilities and the Arts. Approximately 100 local students were in attendance.

Although the show closed on Broadway in late January following an extended limited engagement, it will live on, as the national tour will launch in early 2017. Hopefully, it will achieve further success and continue to inspire others.



The Deaf West Theater production of *Spring Awakening*

Book and Lyrics by Steven Sater

Music by Duncan Sheik

Directed by Michael Arden and choreographed by Spencer Liff

Pictured (counter-clockwise from bottom left): Treshelle Edmond, Ali Stroker, Amelia Hensley, Lauren Luiz, Kathryn Gallagher, Krysta Rodriguez, and Alexandra Winter

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Yoga soothes the body and soul

By Suzie Lazar

There are a multitude of benefits that can be gleaned from the practice of yoga. It can have many benefits for children with ADHD and autism, including building body and self awareness, focus through breath work, calmness, increased brain-body coordination, self-confidence, promoting gross and fine motor skills, and enhancing social emotional awareness.

Jackie Herman has a passion for both yoga and working with children with special needs, and has combined them into one program. After many years and many hours of completing various yoga certification programs (Yoga FIT, Luna Yoga, prenatal yoga, chair yoga for seniors & yoga for Children with ADHD and Autism), and training as a support worker at the Miriam Foundation, Herman is now sharing her expertise with the special needs community in Montreal.

Herman's main objective is to help children who have ADHD or autism learn calming and tension-releasing techniques in a fun

and non-judgmental environment. What better way to do this than through breathing techniques taught through yoga.

The props used to teach deep breathing include blowing into a straw, and blowing colourful feathers. These two simple activities help a child redirect their energy into a prop that forces them to breath deeply and as a result, calm down.

Deep breathing is known to calm our bodies and minds, bringing with it a plethora of physical and emotional benefits, including decreasing our stress response. Herman suggests that teaching yogic breathing exercises is an ideal way to start working with children who have ADHD and autism.

Both Herman and the parents of her students notice the benefits of a personalized one-on-one practice. Careful consideration is given to creating the right setting for the yoga practice, assessing the child's particular needs and then making the sessions fun by using games and props. The simple and child-friendly instructions are aimed at helping a child live more comfortably in his or her own body.



Jackie Herman demonstrating yoga at the All Abilities Expo 2015.
(Photo credit, Arman Ayva, Courtesy of the All Abilites Expo)

Whether conducting classes or working with kids individually, Herman has observed that children love the simplified and adapted movements, poses and breathing exercises. "I personally feel very fulfilled when I see the children smile, laugh, have fun and experience something new," shares Herman.

An additional benefit of yoga classes is the

new relaxation techniques that parents acquire while observing their children learn new skills. These techniques can be used any time, anywhere, and help parents learn to guide their child to relax during a stressful moment or in preparation for bedtime.

For more information, contact Jackie Herman at jackiegonshor@yahoo.ca.

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Sports by Daniel Smajovits



The Road to Rio

Rio.

The name conjures up the sights and sounds of Carnival, the beauty of Copacabana and Ipanema Beach and Christ the Redeemer with his outstretched arms, towering over millions.

Yet, for nearly 200 Canadians, Rio means all that and much, much more. Beginning on September 7th, the city will be host to the 2016 Paralympic Games, marking the

culmination of four years of blood, sweat and tears.

With Canadian athletes hoping to qualify in 21 of 22 sports, the contingent hopes to challenge its record of 96 medals, set at the 2000 Games in Sydney, Australia.

Leading the charge will be five-time Paralympian and Chef de Mission, Chantal Petitclerc. During her career, the native Montrealer competed in five Games, winning 21 medals, including 14 gold. Her presence will undoubtedly inspire Team Canada as they will be competing against athletes from over 160 countries.

Canadians to Watch:

Benoit Huot, Swimming, Montreal.

With 19 Paralympic medals to his credit, Huot is one of the most decorated Paralympic athletes of all time. Should he capture four more in Rio, he will pass Tim McIsaac with the most medals for any Canadian swimmer in Paralympic history. Huot is the world-record holder in the 200-meter individual medley and, also, the defending champion. While he faces stiff competition in the pool, especially from hometown favourite Andre Brasil, Huot should once again reach the podium multiple times in South America.

Janet McLachlan, Wheelchair Basketball, North Vancouver

McLachlan is the undisputed leader of Canada's Wheelchair Basketball team. Although Canada finished in 6th place at the 2012 Paralympic Games, McLachlan, nonetheless, led the tournament in points scored and rebounds. Continuing her upward trend, at last summer's Parapan Am Games in Toronto, she led Team Canada with 15.6 points per game and was second in assists with 16. Her dominating performance led to her being named as Canada's Wheelchair Basketball Canada Female Athlete of the Year for the third time. Having never won a Paralympic medal, there will be a lot of pressure on her shoulders in Rio. However, we fully expect her to lead Team Canada to the podium.

Marco Dispaltro, Boccia, Montreal

As one of the world's foremost Boccia players, Dispaltro is heavily favoured to do well at the 2016 games. The 49-year-old is known worldwide as a tough competitor,

having developed an edge during his days playing rugby. Backing up the tough attitude is talent that seems to be improving with age. Having won a bronze medal at the 2012 Paralympic Games, Dispaltro ended the 2014 season as the number-one ranked Boccia player in the world, earning him the incredible honour of being Canada's flag bearer at the Parapan Am Games Opening Ceremonies last summer. He added a pairs silver medal to his trophy case during the games and is looking to finally grab gold in Rio.

Alison Levine, Boccia, Montreal

Bursting onto the Boccia scene, Levine only began competing in 2013, after being recruited to the sport by Marco Dispaltro. However, in her three years on the world stage, Levine has earned a career's worth of hardware. At the young age of 25, Levine undoubtedly represents the future of the sport and she met these expectations at the Parapan Am Games, winning silver alongside Dispaltro. Levine has won multiple medals at a number of international competitions and her first Paralympic Games will undoubtedly be an experience she will never forget. She should have plenty of new jewellery to declare upon her return to Canada.

Stefan Daniel, Para-Triathlete, Calgary

Simon Whitfield inspired countless Canadian triathletes after capturing the first ever-Olympic gold medal in the sport at the 2000 Olympic Games. However, Stefan Daniel was not one of them, as when Whitfield was celebrating his incredible accomplishment, Daniel was merely two years old. Sixteen years later, Daniel has emerged as Canada's best Para-Triathlete, representing the future of the sport internationally and he is firmly

the man to beat in Rio. As the reigning World Champion, Daniel is on a hot streak, earning medals at the last three World Championships, ascending from bronze to the aforementioned gold last September in Chicago. At only 18 years old, he is taking advantage of his youth, competing in able-bodied Cross Country Running and



Triathlons as well as Para-Triathlons. Rio might mark Daniel's first foray into the Paralympics, but we're already booking his ticket to Tokyo and beyond.

*Top right: Alison Levine.
Middle left: Janet McLachlan.
Middle right: Benoit Huot.
Bottom: Benoit Huot in the pool.
(Photos courtesy of the
Canadian Paralympic
Committee)*





Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen



NEW YORK CITY EXPERIENCE: My family and I recently experienced a wonderful five days in New York City. Of course, the Big Apple is also one pretty terrific place to shop, from the boutiques of Madison Avenue, the iconic department stores on Fifth Avenue, the world's largest Macy's, the two bargain-packed Century 21 locales and the fashion-forward shops in SoHo and the Village. There are many great museums to choose from as well.

Among the most popular tourists stops in the Big Apple are the 9/11 Memorial, the Empire State Building, the Museum of Civilization, Ellis Island, The Statue of Liberty, Central Park/the Central Park Zoo and the Bronx Zoo.

CITY PASS: Before your departure look into purchasing the New York CityPASS (www.citypass.com). You will save 42 percent on the city's six best attractions - plus skip lines. New York CityPASS includes admission to the Empire State Building Experience, The American Museum of Natural History, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Top of the Rock Observation Deck or the Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, and Statue of Liberty & Ellis Island or Circle Line Sightseeing Cruises, 9/11 Memorial & Museum or Intrepid Sea, Air & Space Museum. The cost is \$114 for adults (a \$195 value) and \$89 for youth (aged six to 17, an \$89 value). It is valid for nine days. You can purchase the booklets or printable vouchers

at citypass.com or at participating attractions for the same low price.

The one place I wanted to explore was Top of The Rock (www.topoftherock.com), translating into climbing 70 floors to the top of iconic Rockefeller Center. With my CityPASS in hand I went there on several occasions, only to be turned away due to zero visibility. For future reference, all hallways, exhibits and restrooms are wheelchair accessible. Power assist doors are located at the main entrance on 50th Street between Fifth and Sixth Avenues. Elevators are available at all Top of the Rock entrances and on street level on 49th and 50th streets for access to the concourse entrances. Washrooms have designated wheelchair accessible stalls. Guides are trained to accommodate anyone in need by leading the tour through wheelchair accessible routes and at an appropriate speed. For all short films played during the Top of the Rock experience, printed transcripts are available upon request from any Top of the Rock staff. All visitors are given a personal headset with a closed circuit connection to allow optimal audio clarity. Guides are trained to speak at an appropriate volume and speed upon request. Service dogs are welcome in all public areas.

By the way, I picked up my CityPASS at the Official NYC Information Center at Macy's Herald Square. In addition to the city specialists who are there to answer any



The dining room of db Bistro Moderne.

of your questions, the center also features touch-screen information kiosks to help you plan your trip, featuring Google maps and the ability to print directions; a multitude of guides and maps; and tickets for various attractions (many discounted). Visitors can also enjoy a Macy's 10 percent off visitors Shopping Pass, which is obtainable for free from the center's specialists or by using a driver's license or passport at one of the kiosks. Located inside the Macy's flagship store on 34th Street between Seventh Avenue and Broadway, the center is convenient not only by many subway lines, but also the Long Island Rail Road, New Jersey Transit and Amtrak - which all operate in and out of Penn Station, located across the street. In addition, 34th Street is a major shopping hub in Manhattan and the location of a number of flagship stores.

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

WHERE TO STAY: We really wanted to stay close to Times Square on this trip and hit the jackpot with the famous Algonquin Hotel (www.algonquinhotel.com). Located in the heart of Midtown Manhattan, this jewel of historic New York hotels commands the center of 44th Street, close to the bustling heart of Times Square and Fifth Avenue. The Algonquin first opened its doors in 1902. Today it is part of the Marriott

chain's Autograph Collection, an evolving ensemble of strikingly independent hotels. Each destination has been selected for its quality, bold originality, rich character and uncommon details. From near to far, iconic to historic, the result is an array of properties that is nothing less than unique. The Algonquin Hotel is the first New York City property to become a part of the collection. "The Autograph Collection is a very cool brand," says Nicholas Sciammarella, manager of marketing and e-commerce. "Each hotel in this group is really unique and different to stay at."

For 100 years, the Algonquin has been greeting and lodging the country's most prominent writers and literary personalities, as well as the leading figures of the American stage. The hotel is best known, perhaps, for the members of the Round Table, a group of luminaries who had in common both the ability to fire blazing witticisms and to withstand being on the receiving end of them. The tone they set during their daily meetings set the literary style of the 1920s. After World War I, Vanity Fair writers and Algonquin regulars Dorothy Parker, Robert Benchley and Robert E. Sherwood began lunching at the Algonquin. Though society columns referred to them as the Algonquin Round Table, they called themselves the Vicious Circle. "By force of character," observed drama critic Brooks Atkinson, "they changed the nature of American comedy and established the tastes of a new period in the arts and theatre."

Each of the 181 rooms and 25 suites features a comfortable well-lit work desk, as well as complimentary Wi-Fi. Always one step ahead of everyone else, the hotel was the first to offer accommodations to actors and single women travellers. We stayed in a very comfortable one bedroom suite named the Robert Sherwood Suite.



The spacious living room area in the one bedroom suite at the Algonquin.



Delighting thirsty revelers when it opened at the demise of the Prohibition in 1933, The Blue Bar has moved – both physically and eruditely – through decades of Times Square hotel bar trends. There is also The Round Table Restaurant and the casual Lobby Lounge.

As a cat lover I was eager to meet Matilda, the house cat. She is a real beauty and can be found sleeping in her cat house at the front desk or making her way through the different cat doors on the main floor. Matilda is a large ragdoll cat, soft as velvet. Operations manager Abeer Soliman was kind enough to bring her out so I could pet her.

I received a copy of a book about the hotel when I checked in called *The Algonquin Kid: Adventures Growing Up In New York's Legendary Hotel*. The author is Librettist/Lyricist Michael Colby, whose grandparents Mary and Ben Bodne, owned the hotel from 1946 to 1987. As a kid, Colby and siblings visited their grandparents every weekend. Colby took up permanent residence in the hotel at the age of 18 and made his way into the theater world as a librettist, composer and lyricist. His musical, *Charlotte Sweet*, an all-sung, all-rhymed original musical with libretto by Colby and music by Gerald Jay Markoe, received three Drama Desk Award nominations and was critically lauded as “adorable, strange and delectable” by the New York Times. If you have never stayed at the Algonquin before, this book will make you want to. It is available at www.amazon.com and www.michaelcolby.com.

The Algonquin, its bar and restaurant, have easy access for wheelchairs from the street. There is valet parking. The hotel has six ADA (the Americans with Disabilities Act) rooms and one ADA suite. There are

two elevators. The staff is very helpful and friendly.

DINING OUT: New York City is indeed the place to dine, with an endless array of choices to please your palate. Needless to say, there is no shortage of kosher restaurants here either. These include Reserve Cut, Grill 212, 2nd Avenue Deli, La Brochette and Nish Nush.

We enjoyed our first experience at Benjamin Steakhouse (www.benjaminsteakhouse.com), located at 52 East 41st Street, one block from Grand Central Station. From their juicy cuts of dry aged beef, to old world charm and elegant ambiance, Benjamin's ensures that only the best USDA prime beef is used. Every cut is carefully dry-aged in specially handcrafted aging boxes, chilled to the precise temperature and humidity level, for a minimum of 28 days. The key effect of the dry aging process is the concentration of flavor. There is another locale just north of the Big Apple in Westchester County.

Since its opening in 2006, it is easy to see why this place has established itself as one of the Big Apple's premier steakhouses, attracting business professionals and celebrities alike. In fact there are wall-to-wall framed photos of owner Benjamin Prevlukaj with A-list celebs, from talkshow host Jon Stewart to well-known athletes. Prevlukaj and Chef Arturo McLeod have combined their 30-plus years of experience into a menu complete with amazing selections.

Chef McLeod personally patronizes New York's top meat markets to carefully select prime USDA meat that fits his highest-level of criteria. Benjamin also features delectable non-red meat dishes; such as rich and buttery Chilean sea bass or grilled Norwegian salmon, with its mild and delicate fla-



Benjamin Steakhouse serves up absolutely fine cuisine.

vor. Diners are also passionate about the extravagant seafood platter, which consists of fresh oysters on the half shell, jumbo shrimp, half-lobsters and juicy lump crabmeat. We absolutely loved that item and especially appreciated the care our waiter Charley took in recommending exactly what to order. Alberto Belegu, one of the managers, is very hands-on with the customers and paid a lot of attention to our table. He personally portioned out the contents of the seafood platter for each of us and recommended a white wine to have with the appetizers and a red to go with our main course. General Manager Mario Buqaj is also very present in the restaurant.

Our waiter Charley had started us off with some warm onion rolls and butter, followed by the extraordinary seafood platter and some baked breaded clams. The three of us then shared a delicious Benjamin's salad. For the main course we let Charley steer us in the right direction. We shared porter house and rib steaks, both of which cut like butter and were cooked to perfection at medium. We decided on three sides: the Benjamin home fries, steamed asparagus and sautéed mushrooms. It was a meal fit for a king! Did we have room for dessert? The choices were pretty difficult to ignore. We settled on the decadent chocolate mousse cake and the tantalizing creme brûlée. I have been to a number of steakhouses in New York. My favorite for years was Ben Benson's, which closed down a few years back. Benjamin's combination of amazing food, service and ambiance brings it right to the top.

The restaurant has three levels. It is wheelchair accessible from the street level. An elevator goes down to the lower floor where the washrooms are located. For reservations call 1-212-297-9177.

And now for another culinary experience. Having dined for the first time last summer at Maison Boulud at the iconic

Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Montreal, I was anxious to try one of famous chef Daniel Boulud's eight restaurants in the Big Apple. My choice was db Bistro Moderne (<http://www.dbbistro.com/nyc>), home of the famed “db Burger” and literally right next door to the Algonquin. It is located at 55 West 44th Street. The bistro is considered Boulud's contemporary interpretation of the Parisian classic and a restaurant where traditional French cuisine meets the flavors of the American market. The seasonal menu highlights the quality of fine ingredients served in a casual setting. This is one of New York's top-rated bistros offering easy going, and delicious dining at breakfast, lunch and dinner, and is a favorite pre- and post-theater destination.

I dined solo on this occasion and received a friendly welcome from general manager Rachel Ossakow who went over the menu for me. I started off with a plate of smoked salmon, with bagel chips and cream cheese and sampled the roasted mushroom crostini, featuring house-made butter, garlic confit and chives. Before the main course I enjoyed a delicious bowl of fall squash soup, which contained spaghetti squash and pumpkin seeds. There were so many mouth-watering selections to choose from, but I went for the house specialty - the original db Burger. This is a sirloin burger, served medium or rare, and filled with braised short ribs, foie gras and black truffle inside a parmesan buns and pommes frites on the side. I will have to go back as the seafood dishes, the duck, lamb, chicken, steak, salads and side dishes looked very appetizing. The dessert menu was not too shabby either. I settled on the Toasted Sesame Bavaroise, a flourless chocolate biscuit with blood orange and mandarin sorbet. As well, a nice cup of chamomile tea concluded my order. The restaurant has a very extensive wine



The Algonquin Hotel.



Continued from Page 37

list and an on-site sommelier. Log on to www.danielnyc.com to see this menu and the others from the Boulud group. You can call 1-212-391-2400 for reservations.

The restaurant is wheelchair accessible. You can enter through the hotel next door, where they have a ramp and an elevator. One of the washrooms is wheelchair accessible.

SPECIAL NEEDS: The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities (MOPD) was established in 1973 and serves as a liaison between city government and disabled individuals, as well as organizations dedicated to improving the lives of New Yorkers with disabilities. MOPD provides policy recommendations to the mayor and works with city agencies and private individuals and organizations to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities.

New York City is committed to ensuring accessibility for visitors with special needs, and has equipped all buses with lifts for those in wheelchairs and those who have difficulty climbing stairs. In addition, many subway stations contain elevators, ramps, visual display signs, accessible public telephones and tactile and audio features on vending machines. Passengers with disabilities are eligible for reduced fares on most trips by using their Medicare card as proof of eligibility.

To assist those with special needs,

Scoutaround, a wheelchair and scooter rental business, makes sure travelers are totally mobile no matter where they go. Whether the destination is a cruise, a convention, a swanky vacation or a trip to the Big Apple, Scoutaround features a toll-free line with friendly operators available 24/7 and delivery to and pick up from wherever you are.

The City's Accessible Dispatch program allows wheelchair users to request a wheelchair-accessible taxi for a pickup anywhere in Manhattan to a destination anywhere in the five boroughs, Westchester County, Nassau County or Newark Airport. Passengers pay the metered taxi fare; no advance reservation is necessary.

The Broadway Accessibility Initiative, the result of a partnership between organizations Inclusion in the Arts and G-PASS, offers theatergoers with disabilities the opportunity to enjoy more Broadway shows with services like I-Caption for deaf and hard-of-hearing patrons, D-Scriptive for blind and low-vision theatre-goers and ShowTrans for non-English-speaking audience members. The Lion King and The Book of Mormon are currently featuring these services. For more information, visit g-pass.org or inclusioninthearts.org.

For more details go to <http://www.nycgo.com/accessibility>.

POUGHKEEPSIE OVERNIGHT: When travelling to New York City, our family always likes to stop over somewhere on the way in order to make the most of our first day in the Big Apple and avoid getting stuck at the border. For our most recent trip we decided to go a little bit further than Saratoga or Albany and targeted the Town of Poughkeepsie, a mere 90 minutes from New York.

We stayed at the Holiday Inn Express at 2750 South Road. General Manager Rachel Kuhn and her team are in the midst of a \$3 million redecoration plan in 2016.

We stayed in a one bedroom suite, which included a sleeper sofa and a Jacuzzi tub. There was a coffee maker, microwave oven, mini refrigerator, plates/glassware and silverware. I really liked the layout. In the main bedroom there was an extremely comfortable lounge chair. The bathroom was gigantic, with access from both rooms. This is very convenient for the person on the sleeper sofa who does not have to worry about waking anyone up.

The hotel has 121 rooms and attracts both leisure and corporate travellers. A free hot buffet breakfast, as well as one of the continental variety, is offered daily. The lobby is very welcoming to someone like me who likes to work on his laptop late into the night and not disturb others in the room. I set up shop at one of the comfortable tables, helped myself to some coffee and a freshly



The Holiday Inn Express in Poughkeepsie, New York.

baked chocolate chip cookie from the front desk and got to work. It was a most comfortable work environment.

The 24-hour fitness room features everything you'll need to stay on track with your routine: a treadmill, lifecycle, stair master, recumbent bicycle, free weights, and a two-stage universal gym. There is also a 24-hour business center and a seasonal outdoor pool.

The hotel provides accessible parking and self-parking, van accessible self-parking, portable tub seats, communication kits with visual alarms and notification devices, TTY for guest use and closed caption televisions.

For more information log on to www.hiexpress.com/poughkeepsie or call 1-877-660-8550.

Mike Cohen can be reached at info@mike-cohen.ca. See his travel advice column at www.sandboxworld.com/travel.

Aéroports de Montréal sensitizes kids with special needs

By Suzie Lazar

On April 10, Aéroports de Montréal hosted its fourth annual Premium Kids program, an initiative that helps parents and their children with autism spectrum disorder or functional limitations alleviate some of the stress they might experience when traveling by air.

The goal of Premium Kids is to familiarize special needs children with the airport so that when their families do decide to travel (for pleasure or for medical appointments), the child will be more comfortable with the airport and its unique environment.

For children with autism and other special needs, traveling can be a tremendous challenge. A change in routine, unfamiliar surroundings and faces, unfamiliar noises, long line-ups, delays and crowds, all contribute to an over-stimulating experience.

This simulated travel experience provided families the opportunity to rehearse the full airport process, from parking to entering the airport, obtaining boarding passes, passing through security screening and a metal detector, walking to their gate, waiting in the lounge and finally, boarding and sitting in an aircraft. During this exercise, parents can zero in on which part of the airport experience presents a challenge for their child so they can be better prepared when actually traveling.

Prior to this event, staff at Giant Steps and Autism Montréal provided families with a "social story" (pictures and words describing the step-by-step process they would experience at the airport). Parents were advised to repeatedly read this social story to their special needs child in order to best prepare them.

This year's event had the largest participation, with over 90 families registered, and

over 284 people in attendance. The Air Transat Airbus 330 was almost at full capacity.

To ensure no one lost their way and to answer questions, a team of Premium Kids volunteers were stationed along the route to the gate. The airport staff, including the shuttle bus driver and security staff, welcomed everyone with smiles.

This program exposes the airport staff to the needs of children with intellectual or developmental disabilities, teaching them how to accommodate to their specific needs. The staff, together with parents, worked hard in helping alleviate the stress that comes with air travel.



Air Transat staff at Premium Kids airport sensitization process event at Aéroports de Montréal.

(Photo courtesy of Aéroports de Montréal)

Generous sponsors of Premium Kids include Aéroports de Montréal, Air Transat, Canadian Air Transport Security authority, Canadian Border Service Agency, Transport Canada and Marriott Hotels. Partners include Special Olympics Quebec, Giant Steps, and Autism Montréal.



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