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INSPIRATIONS

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CIRCLES OF SUPPORT

RESPOND TO PARENTS' FEARS, CHILD'S DREAMS

WAGAR STUDENTS WALK FOR TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION

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Meaghan Lang performing "Let It Be" in November 2019. Photo: Louis Caron



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Editor's message

Mike Cohen

This edition of *Inspirations* is filled with informative and inspirational stories that we hope will guide you in your journey and keep your spirits high as we move into the winter months.

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our special advisor, Nick Katalifos, on his appointment as director general of the English Montreal School Board. We wish him much success in this role, and know that our community will benefit from his vast knowledge and experience in both the fields of education and special needs.

Our Circles of Support feature (p. 12) provides insight on the topic and shares the experiences of two Montreal families who turned to their community to create support networks of their own. As you will read, Circles of Support aim to help families with day-to-day living as well as long-term planning, and enhance the life of their child with special needs.

Share your stories with us, and feel free to send your ideas and comments to

info@inspirationsnews.com.

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INSPIRATIONS

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Editor

Mike Cohen

Managing Editor and Coordinator of Operations

Wendy Singer

News Editor

Kristin McNeill

Layout & Design

Zulfiye Erdem

Consulting Editor

Julie René de Cotret

Copy Editors

Manon Bourassa,
Kristin McNeill

Proofreaders

Randy Pinsky,
Zach Reisman

Special Advisors

Joanne Charron,
Nick Katalifos, Lew Lewis

Advertising & Sponsorship

Lorri Benedik,
Rikee Guthertz-Madoff

Administration

Ivana Bahdo

Phone: 514-483-7200, ext. 7244

Fax: 514-483-7213

Email: info@inspirationsnews.com

Website: www.inspirationsnews.com

Facebook: [inspirationsnews](https://www.facebook.com/inspirationsnews)

Twitter: [inspirationsmtl](https://twitter.com/inspirationsmtl)

6000 Fielding Ave. Suite 109
Montreal, Quebec H3X 1T4

Steven Atme is a man without limits

by *Tania Piperni*

Atme acknowledges his autism is a gift and that it was important for him to understand his strengths and his challenges in order to be able to use this knowledge to teach others how to use their own strengths.



Simon Chang and Steven Atme instantly connected when they initially met on a video call in early September. Chang quickly recognized Atme's creativity and leadership in addition to his whimsical, fun side. "I am delighted to honour Steven with the Simon Chang Difference Maker Award. Steven has a great story to tell and is motivating the current and next generation to express themselves and embrace their own passions," said Chang.

Like Atme, Chang encourages everyone to follow their dreams. "All my life I've been told I can't do it. But, when I follow my instincts, the creativity comes and has led to success. It is challenging for creative people; we need to believe in ourselves," Chang said. "Steven is the perfect example and inspiration."

Chang is currently working with Atme to celebrate the 10th anniversary of his "Special People Have Dreams" speech. The Simon Chang Foundation for Change is sponsoring Atme's speaking engagement at McGill University's Faculty of Education and is funding his touring of schools to share his message with teachers and parents in the Greater Montreal and surrounding areas.

Steven Atme, recipient of the Simon Chang Difference Maker Award for the Fall 2021/Winter 2022 edition, wears many hats: musician, performer, speaker, teacher, writer, humanitarian, advocate. He is a man who has inspired so many to overcome their own challenges, pursue dreams and embrace their talents. He believes "that everybody is their own leader, can start their own journey and can create something new."

Atme was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder around the age of four. He was a late talker, and still fondly remembers how his grandfather supported him by always saying, "Steven will speak when he wants to speak." When he started school he was bullied, but he persevered and learned social skills and academics. Despite his limited vocabulary at the time, Atme explains that "music had a way of helping me express my emotions by singing aloud all my favourite songs I heard on the radio or TV." This eventually helped him develop communication skills.

While he had difficulties understanding and following directions, Atme is grateful to his former teacher Maria Cordova at Parkdale Elementary School of the English Montreal School Board for helping him learn how to read and write. Later, at Summit School, he continued his academics and benefitted from speech therapy and learning social skills. At 17, Summit School gave him a scholarship to take piano lessons at the McGill Conservatory. It wasn't long before he was reading music.

Atme was always musically inclined. At a young age, he remembers putting one toy piano atop another to pretend to play the organ.



The Atme family and Simon Chang met in the Simon Chang for Change Foundation conference room in Montreal on October 19. From left, Elie Atme (Steven's father), Simon Chang, Steven Atme and Jacqueline Daou (Steven's mother). Photo: Pickle Creative

When he got his first electric keyboard, he happily played "Happy Birthday" by ear, without any lessons. Inspired strongly by Tchaikovsky's compositions, Atme pursued the piano and started to compose original music. Ten years ago, while volunteering at St. Joseph's Oratory, Atme realized his calling was to use music to help those with special needs, to become an advocate and humanitarian. From that his "Special People Have Dreams" speech emerged, where he shared his personal experience of living with autism and succeeding through his love of music.

He recounts the memory of when his parents gave him "The Talk" at 10 years old. When summoned by his parents he thought he was going to be punished, but instead they told him about his diagnosis. He asked what autism was and if it was curable. He recalls his parents carefully explaining everything; how it was a part of him and a part of his brain that he would always have; how it was a gift and that it would allow him to do whatever he wanted. His mom told him, "You will make a huge difference in the future in whatever you set your heart and mind to." He definitely lived up to that expectation by being his true self, "I'm just Steven. The end. I am who I am."

Family has been Atme's foundation. His parents and sisters didn't treat him differently, and helped him work out any behavior "mishaps." Music was always a part of his family life and became his coping strategy. He started to teach piano to people

with and without autism. From working with young children, he has learned that the key is to think like them. "We have to communicate the same way as them, to see how they do things, and tap into their ideas." He hopes his clients will each go on and pay it forward to inspire others.

Atme acknowledges his autism is a gift and that it was important for him to understand his strengths and his challenges in order to be able to use this knowledge to teach others how to use their own strengths.

Over the years, Atme has performed with the I Can Dream Theatre; produced his own movie *The Power of One* and during the pandemic, organized and staged "Artistic Heroes," a virtual talent show to showcase the works of people with special needs.

Atme was very emotional when he was told he had been selected as the Simon Chang Difference Maker recipient. It touched him to have been nominated by the people of Montreal and selected by the Chang team. By sharing his life story and talents, he truly is an inspiration to students, educational staff, audience members and clients alike. He continues to build a community, build friendships and build a better world for people with special needs so they can be happy and successful. ■

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

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MNA for Westmount–Saint-Louis
Official Opposition Critic for Diversity and Inclusion,
LGBTQ2 and for People Living with Handicaps or Autism
Spectrum Disorder

jennifer.maccarone.WSL@assnat.qc.ca

Riding Office

1134, Sainte-Catherine Ouest,
8th floor office 801
Montreal (Quebec)
H3B 1H4
Fax : 514 395-2955
Phone : 514 395-2929

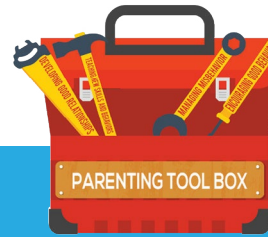
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Chang's passion for fashion, giving, spreads across Montreal

by Wendy Singer

This fall, Montreal-area students have had the unique opportunity to learn about fashion, colour and creativity from Canadian fashion designer Simon Chang. He recently dropped by two classrooms with bags of fabric and loads of ideas, ready to contribute to projects that teachers have put much effort into preparing for their students.

As reported in *Inspirations'* Fall 2020/Winter 2021 edition, the Simon Chang Foundation for Change, created in 2018, has partnered with *Inspirations* to help further Chang's vision of positively impacting the lives of people in his community.

Chang's first stop was teacher Tatiana Lednow's woodworking class at John Grant High School (English Montreal School Board) in Côte Saint-Luc on October 7. Her project: sewing aprons and sleeves to wear while constructing and painting flower boxes in the wood shop.

Chang arrived with an apron for each student, sleeves cut from skinny jeans, and patches of fabric, trimmings and buttons to glam them up. To imagine the excitement in the room, think of a visit from Santa 10 weeks early! All fabric was generously do-

nated by Damar Trading International and Jo-Eltex International Inc., and all buttons by Standard Button.

Chang demonstrated how to create a "colour story" as a base for any creation, encouraging students to let their imagination run free. "You can do anything you put your mind to; you just have to give it a try," said Chang.

In an email Lednow wrote to Chang, she said, "After seeing all the fabric pieces presented, I understand how long and hard Mr. Chang worked putting the colour stories together. The skinny jeans are the best ideas for sleeves. They are tight enough and light enough to use without sewing anything!"

On October 13, Chang was welcomed by the "Sew Good" class at Summit School's Transitional Education and Career Center (TECC) campus in downtown Montreal. He arrived with a box of denim fabric to make tote bags, and once again with the same donated fabric and button samples to decorate the bags.

Sewing teacher Lisa Lefler was excited to see her students so engaged. "We were

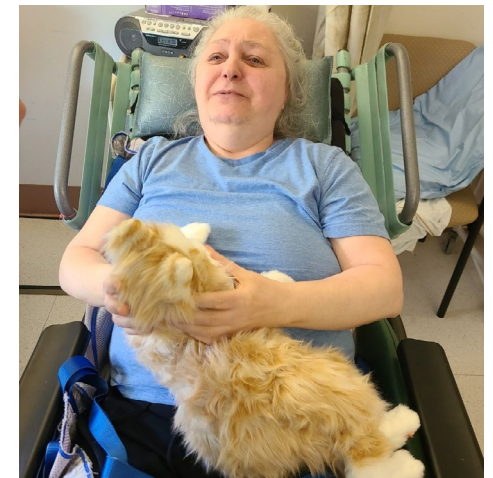


Student Jahsun Carey, left, talks fashion with Simon Chang at Summit School's TECC campus on October 13. |

planning on making simple tote bags. Mr. Chang's ideas have completely elevated our project!" she said.

In describing the meeting with Chang as "awesome," student Jahsun Carey said, "He's a cool dude. He's an inspiration, and I hope he comes to see us again."

"The students inspire me with their creativity and ability to overcome barriers and find what they love to do," said Chang. "Bringing everyone together, from our suppliers who donate the fabric to the teachers and students who welcome us, is what my Foundation is all about. We are all learning and helping one another."



Eldercare resident Svetlana enjoying time with her mechanical cat.

Photo: Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare Centre



From left, Shayla, Kara, Simon Chang, Edward, Corie, Zora and teacher Tatiana Lednow having fun choosing fabrics to decorate their aprons with at John Grant High School on October 7.

Sensory cat brings smiles to Eldercare resident and staff

When staff at the Donald Berman Jewish Eldercare Centre in Montreal placed a sensory-friendly, life-sized mechanical cat that is soft, purrs, feels warm and responds to touch on resident Svetlana's lap, they were amazed at what transpired.

Svetlana is almost blind and has dementia. She was alone and isolated as she speaks Russian and only a little French. "When our volunteer visited her and put a mechanical cat on her lap she started laughing, crying and talking. With the help of Google Translate, we understood that she had had a cat and it reminded her of her past," said Josie Di Benedetto, clinical supervisor for the centre's Recreation Department. "I put in a request to get Svetlana a cat of her own, and it is now a part of her care plan.

We find Svetlana to be more alert, more verbal. There's life to her now. It's beautiful to see."

This gift was made possible through the Simon Chang Foundation for Change that funds the Moment in Time Program run by the centre. The program seeks to grant the wishes of residents of both the Eldercare and the Donald Berman Maimonides Geriatric centres.

"Svetlana is a young resident, only in her 60s. The staff is so committed to improving Svetlana's quality of life. We are so grateful to Simon for funding the Moment in Time program. Most of our residents' wishes are so simple, and Simon is making them come true," said Karen Flam, director of the Eldercare and Maimonides foundations.

New facilities on the way for Summit School students

by *Jordan Stoopler*

Summit School has come a very long way since being founded in 1963 with all of four students. Now with over 630 students enrolled, the school is just about ready to break ground on “the biggest expansion Summit School has ever had,” according to Susan Kasner, the school’s president.

“We are outgrowing our space,” said Stuart Guttman, director of Development & Major Gifts for the Summit School Foundation. “In order for our staff to be able to continue to provide the excellent services and quality of work that they do for our students, we need to grow. This is the next step in Summit School’s continuing evolution.”

The expansion will see a state-of-the-art Physical Education and Creative Arts Centre be built on the school’s existing

land. The project is being funded by a \$12.5-million capital campaign led by Jean-François Beaulieu, Robert Collette, Adam Star, Adam Bucci and Foundation president Joe Rabinovitch.

Guttman says the expansion will also allow two more classrooms to be created in the main building. This opens up more spaces for students on the school’s waiting list; and more students means more demand for the unique programs the school offers. “There isn’t a creative arts center for the special-needs population in Quebec,” said Guttman.

Herman Erdogan, Summit School’s director general, said, “This building will grow our dynamic creative and performing arts programs – programs that have already brought original musicals and theatrical productions to stages across Montreal. The



Summit School raised over \$100,000 in support of the school’s capital campaign at their golf tournament fundraiser at the Royal Montreal Golf Club on October 7. Staff and students are joined by Stuart Guttman, director of Development and Major Gifts for the Summit School Foundation; Jonathan Dathan, senior vice president of Insight Canada; and Herman Erdogan, Summit School director general. Photo: Marlon Kuhnreich

new building is an investment in the idea that our students can find identity, confidence and joy through the arts. Now, there will be no limit to what we can do.”

The new gym, fitness and yoga rooms will also allow for a focus on student health through physical activity and mindfulness. The new music room and visual arts room are designed to provide space to create exhibitions and concerts. “We’ll even have a rooftop activity area for green initiatives.

Not to mention we hope to start a school TV station in the new Media Arts Room,” said Rabinovitch.

“We’re changing the dynamic of our building,” said Erdogan. “It is opening up so many more doors for our children.”

The school is looking to start construction this winter, with the building slated to be ready in time for the start of the 2023-2024 school year. ■

REACH School set for expansion after years in the making

by *Jordan Stoopler*

Across her five years as principal of REACH School of the Riverside School Board – the only English-language public school for special-needs students on the South Shore – Marie-Helen Goyetche has seen enrolment figures nearly double, from 84 students in 2017 to 140 this school year. The increase in students, coupled with a lack of space, required the school to think on its feet.

“All our services are currently spread out,” said Goyetche. “Our speech pathologists and occupational therapists are dispersed across six locations. There is no gym or library at either of our two main locations on Queen and Green streets. We set up intervention rooms in little corners or in what used to be storage rooms. We have become very good at being creative.”

The tight accommodations and lack of resources for students will soon become a thing of the past, as the Quebec govern-

ment has allocated 17 classrooms behind Saint-Lambert International High School to REACH as part of a \$311-million investment to modernize South Shore schools. The announcement this past June was over 15 years in the making, with three previous expansion requests denied by the provincial government.

Goyetche says REACH students, ranging in age from 4 to 21 years old, will gain from being centralized under one roof. The school has plans of setting up a toy library, where students can borrow toys and games, in addition to books in a conventional library. A summer camp for students may also be in the works.

“The majority of our students will be under the same roof, and the ones who need the intervention the most will be able to get it in one dedicated space,” said Goyetche. According to Goyetche, staff will also benefit from the camaraderie that will come from working together in one space.



“We can actually end up in the same building, using all the same resources without having to take our cars from place to place,” she said. “The sense of belonging, whether it be for the students or the staff, is important. By being under the same roof, we are all together. It will be nice to have staff meetings together and collaborate, rather than be spread out across six different silos.”

Construction at the new site is expected to be completed by September 2024. ■

From the left: Sylvain Racette, director general, Riverside School Board (RSB); Jean-René St-Cyr, Saint-Lambert International High School principal; Christopher Craig, RSB Commissioner; Daniel Lamoureux, RSB chair; Nicole Ménard, MNA for Laporte; Marie-Hélène Rancourt, governing board chair; Stefanie Ventura, governing board member; Marie-Helen Goyetche, REACH principal; Angélique Lerocque, REACH secretary; Tina Giugovaz REACH teacher and Nasiera Guermache, REACH vice-principal celebrating the expansion announcement at REACH Queen School in Saint-Lambert on June 22. Photo: RSB

Awesome parents

by *Lorri Benedik*

“I am not comfortable with the label 'awesome' as I am no different from any other parent of a special needs child. I don't have all the answers. What I have are strengths, which I have used to parent and advocate for my son.”
– Jennifer Damiani

Jennifer and Stéphane

When he was a month old, Jennifer Damiani and Stéphane Boivin learned that their son Gabriel had a serious health issue. His heartbeat was weak so their doctor sent them to Sainte-Justine Hospital for an ultrasound. The test revealed the presence of markers in his heart called tubers.



From left, Stéphane Boivin, Gabriel Damiani-Boivin and Jennifer Damiani having a fun day in Centennial Park in DDO in August 2021.
Photo: Jennifer Damiani

Later, Gabriel was diagnosed with tuberous sclerosis complex (TSC), a genetic disorder that causes benign tumours to form in the heart, brain and other organs.

“I began reading about TSC and observed my son closely,” said Damiani. “Gabriel's development progressed normally; he walked at 10 months but we noticed that he would often stare down at his hands and feet.” Around this time, there was a cover story about autism in *Time* magazine. Damiani read it and recognized traits in Gabriel. At age three, they received an official diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder (ASD). He developed epilepsy and requires medication to prevent seizures.

For the past 20 years, Damiani has been communications manager, Corporate Affairs, for Brasserie Labatt. “In my work life I resolve problems by breaking them down into components,” she said. “I approached Gabriel's challenges in the same way – as soon as I suspected he had ASD, we hired therapists to work with him.” This helped him evolve and helped her feel less helpless. Labatt was very supportive, offering her time off for Gabriel's many medical appointments.

When he was 11, Gabriel started attending Summit School, which Damiani describes as “the most beautiful and loving environment.” She joined the governing board. She has also been on the board of West Montreal Readaptation Centre and maintains connections with a network of doctors, social workers and educators.

Gabriel is now 21 and recently graduated from Summit. “He is a wonderful young man; funny, sweet and shares his dad's passion for music,” she said. Damiani explained that she and Boivin are very different but complement each other perfectly. “Stéphane is a creative type, and I am an organizer,” she said. “What we have in common is deep love for our son and dedication to his well-being.”

Ann and Brian

Ann Gagnon has evolved tremendously since meeting her husband, Brian Wraight, when they were teenagers working at Burger King. Today they are mom and dad to Bradley, 23, and Kieran, 18, who both have special needs. “Anyone who knew me growing up would say that I was quiet and unassertive,” said Gagnon. “Because of my sons I have become fearless and a fierce, outspoken advocate.”

When they married, Gagnon and Wraight wanted kids badly. She suffered two miscarriages before becoming pregnant with Bradley. “When he was born, in 1998, we knew immediately there were serious health issues,” she said. “He had microcephaly, clubfoot and a hole in his heart (atrial septal defect). As a newborn, he spent a month at the Montreal Children's Hospital and, at six months, had surgery on both feet.”

After her maternity leave, Gagnon returned to her job at Bombardier and enrolled Bradley at the company daycare. Bombardier invested large sums each year to upgrade their daycare facility and equipment to accommodate his needs. In 2002, Kieran was born. “He seemed fine at birth,” Gagnon said. “But, as time passed, he was not meeting developmental expectations, and our social worker urged us to have him tested.” It was determined that Kieran had Alpha-thalassemia X-linked intellectual disability (ATR-X), a rare genetic disorder affecting multiple organ systems, a syndrome that Bradley also was diagnosed with.

Bradley and Kieran are both non-verbal, visually impaired, require wheelchairs for mobility and help with personal hygiene. “Bradley can crawl, climb into his chair and feed himself,” said Gagnon. “Kieran can't do any of these things and is less aware of his environment.”



Back row: Brian Wraight and Ann Gagnon with their sons Bradley and Kieran in Parc Harpell in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue at a fundraiser for Centre Philou on October 23.
Photo: Allison Randolph

Until last year, both brothers attended Philip E. Layton School of the English Montreal School Board. Bradley graduated and now goes to Centre Philou.

“Our family circumstances are challenging but we have learned that life is never perfect; if you are willing to listen, everyone has a story,” said Gagnon. Wraight has worked for GSK pharmaceuticals for 31 years and has been their sole provider since Gagnon was laid off from Bombardier seven years ago. When she is not caring for Bradley and Kieran, Gagnon volunteers with organizations that lobby for services and rights for the disabled.

“Although my sons cannot express how they feel in words, we have learned that so much of human communication is non-verbal,” she said. “A look or gesture from Bradley or Kieran tells us everything we need to know.” ■

Share your Awesome Parent with us at info@inspirationsnews.com.



Lang family bands together

by *Lorri Benedik*

Michelle Lalancette and Jason Lang are mom and dad to Manu, 23, and Meaghan, 21. Before Meaghan was born, they learned that she had Down syndrome (DS). “It was New Year’s Eve 1999, and we were with friends when the doctor called with the results of Michelle’s amniocentesis,” Lang said. “It was a shock, for sure, and we were aware of our options, but we talked it over and made the decision quickly; we wanted our daughter.” The couple sought families with kids who had DS, observed their interactions and knew they could handle it.

Meaghan was a happy baby. As she grew into toddlerhood, they noticed repetitive behaviours and some arm-flapping, not typical in kids with DS. “She didn’t react much to pain,” said Lang. “On one occasion we discovered Meaghan had strep throat when we saw a discolouration in her mouth while helping her brush her teeth.” She was in preschool when Lang filmed her for a few specialists. It was concluded that, in addition to DS, Meaghan has autism spectrum disorder. Her parents were grateful to have had a complete diagnosis so her needs could be addressed more fully.

“Meaghan is so great,” Lang said. “She has limited vocabulary but communicates what she wants clearly in English and French.”

Lang is the son of iconic Montreal folksinger the late Penny Lang and is an accomplished musician. When the kids were young, the family would go on tour with him. “Meaghan has traveled to 20 countries and has hung out with music royalty and rock stars, including Roch Voisine, Corey Hart, Amanda Marshall and Isabelle Boulay, to name just a few,” he said.

Lalancette is a veterinarian and loves her work, however, in 2012, she was diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (MS). Lang stopped touring. “I still enjoy performing locally and [have] transformed our basement into a professional recording studio, where I enjoy producing music and videos,” said Lang. “Our son, Manu, is a gifted musician, and Meaghan loves to sing and play drums.”

Lalancette has slowed her work pace because of fatigue and MS flare-ups. Last December the couple sold the two veterinary clinics they owned and operated. Lang still juggles a lot between work and family life and says that time management is key. Meaghan thrives on routine and twice a day asks her dad to play songs for her on the guitar and piano – always the same songs in the same order. “She has a phenomenal memory and gets upset if I change anything,” he said.

Lang is spokesperson for the Association de parents d’enfant trisomique-21 Lanaudière (APETL). Before the COVID-19 pandemic, he organized fundraising concerts for them. “Friends, who are world-class musicians, performed, and no one accepted a penny,” he said. “We raised \$150,000 for the association.”

When Meaghan was little, and learning to talk, Lang discovered that her “Fraisinette” (Strawberry Shortcake) doll was a great teaching tool. He used the doll as a puppet, which made eye-contact easier for Meaghan. “I used a high-pitched, humorous voice for Fraisinette and said, ‘I want a hotdog,’ Meaghan repeated ‘hotdog.’” Lang added more foods, one by one, and Meaghan would repeat them all until she

was naming 75 items. “One day I wrote them all down, handed the three-page list to Michelle and said, ‘Watch this!’ Meaghan rattled them all off in precise order.”

Lalancette still works part-time at the veterinary clinic. “We each do our part, and the family is doing fine,” Lang said. “I take care of grocery shopping and meal prep

with a bit of help from Meaghan.” He said that Fraisinette still makes the occasional appearance and sometimes misbehaves. “The doll pretends to bite me and makes rude digestive (farting) noises,” said Lang. “Meaghan loves this so much and treats us to our favourite sound ever – her scrumptious laughter.” ■

Photo: Louis Caron

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Rosemary Maratta launches Autism House

by *Cindy Davis*

Rosemary Maratta is dedicated to her chosen profession of occupational therapy (O.T.).

Guided by the theory of interdependence between the four dimensions of occupation outlined by renowned Dr. Ann Wilcock – doing, being, becoming, and belonging – Maratta has always been devoted to ensuring that her clients are provided the resources and support they need in order to increase their autonomy.

By day, Maratta works full time at Clinique N.E.A.T, a Neurodiversity, Evaluations, Assistance and Therapy Clinic. In her free time, she and her team of volunteers launched Autism House in 2019, a safe space that provides peer-to-peer services to individuals on the autism spectrum and their families.

Located on St. Ambrose St. near the Lachine Canal, Autism House offers a variety of services including individualized autonomy training and support, peer-to-peer support groups in both English and French, parent support groups, a teen club whose members have affectionately named themselves “Autistics Anonymous,” journaling classes, budgeting lessons and more.

The goal, said Maratta, is to allow the participants to put into practice the skills they have learned in school and other guided programming, to provide them with more autonomy and a sense of empowerment in their own lives. The programs are mainly led and guided by the participants themselves, with some volunteer leaders who have autism. Maratta said that she and the other professional volunteers are mainly there to make sure the programs run smoothly, but they generally let the participants take the lead.

“While doing an activity or meaningful occupation, which is the O.T. part, they start chit chatting – it’s just so dynamic,” said Maratta. “They choose topics from week to week and they just talk and socialize and everyone finds it beneficial because it’s a place where they can just be who they are.”

The ultimate goal for Maratta and her team is to continue providing these services while also developing a combined housing and community space project for semi-autonomous adults with autism.

It is her hard work and dedication that motivated Henry Zavriyev to award Rosemary Maratta with the Fall 2021 / Winter 2022 *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award, recognizing outstanding entrepreneurs in the special needs community. As a prize, Zavriyev will be providing Autism House with the funding and support to continue the weekly teen club until Summer 2022.

“The minute I heard about Rosemary and the Autism House I wanted to get involved. It’s hard not to be touched and want to do more when you realize what great lengths Rosemary goes through on a regular basis to help these teens. Our community is lucky to have her and I hope this program can continue for years to come,” said Henry Zavriyev, sponsor of the *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award.

Dania Szanajda, who nominated Maratta for the award after her children were helped by her, was in tears when she found out that she had won. “The introduction of Rosemary Maratta into our children’s lives has produced extraordinary results. Like many special needs’ parents, we endured many disappointments, treatment fatigue and finally, skepticism. Today we are now in awe and grateful,” she said. “Rosemary’s approach is based on science, providing continuous feedback, and loaded with passion. By reinforcing positive outcomes, my children cultivated the desire to return to work harder towards accomplishing their goals while having fun. Definitely a game-changer in our children’s lives, providing us hope, and reason to celebrate and look forward to their future. Rosemary



From left: Gabriella Szanajda, Rosemary Maratta and Gabriella's mother Dania Szanajda at Autism House on November 5.

is my childrens’ inspiration, and, now, mine as well.”

Maratta accepted the award on behalf of the Autism House team, who she said “work so hard to make it happen.”

“I’m so thankful and so grateful to Henry, and so happy that he picked our teenage initiative to support because it’s really close to my heart,” she said. “The teenage years can be a rocky road; they’re going through many changes. Henry’s helping a need that is so important because as they become teenagers, their whole experience of socializing, making friends, being out there or having a place to talk about their interests is vital. I want to thank him so much.”

Riddoch wins *Inspirations’* inaugural entrepreneurial award

by *Cindy Davis*

Last Spring, *Inspirations* introduced you to Henry Zavriyev, and our brand-new award in collaboration with him, The *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award, presented to outstanding entrepreneurs in the special needs community. Our first award winner was Brandon Riddoch, who runs a small art business called Enchanted Trades and who creates custom decorative gift bags for the Light a Dream Boutique and the Bramble House store in Pointe-Claire.

Nominated by Cindy Finn, director general of the Lester B. Pearson School Board, Riddoch was presented with his award during a Zoom ceremony held on July 8 hosted by Mark Bergman from The Beat 92.5. During the ceremony, Zavriyev awarded Riddoch with \$1,000 in gift certificates to Michaels art store as well as an offer to provide Riddoch with his own website, and the coaching of marketing specialist Laurent Cardinal.

Housing survey

The Autism House, in partnership with the Transforming Autism Care Consortium (TACC), is conducting a survey to better understand existing needs to guide future housing initiatives.

To complete the survey, contact
514.625.3258 or
dylan@lamaisondelautisme.ca.

If you have an entrepreneur to nominate, email us at info@inspirationsnews.com.

McGill hosts panel on creating more inclusive workplaces

by *Randy Pinsky*

One positive effect of the pandemic has been the opportunity to re-evaluate the way we work.

On August 5, McGill University's Career Advising and Transition Services team hosted the "Workplace Transformation: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Accessibility (EDIA) in Action" panel as part of their online PowerSkills Career Summit.

The aim of the panel was to get a pulse on EDIA 2021 after collectively going through a year of pandemic. Organizational development advisor Kit Malo put forward the challenge: "Can organizations work in new ways? Is it possible to change the plane as it's flying if it doesn't work [as is]?" For instance, many individuals with disabilities have been able to advance in their careers by working from home; a trend, the panelists agreed, is one worth keeping.

While there have been some important changes or accommodations, autistic advocate and panel member Kelly Bron Johnson observed that most tend to be reactionary.

Even with awareness of the need for greater representation, approaches to promoting diversity can be flawed. Recruiter Samantha Bateman recalled seeing a job posting looking specifically for a person of colour. She commented: "It's not shopping for someone to fix the problem or checking off boxes."

Malo concurred, "The fundamental system has to change; it has to be part of the organizational strategy." As there are still hidden biases in hiring and promotion, there is a need for double-blind skill validation exercises.

According to career adviser Emilie Nketiah, while companies agree on the importance of EDIA, few actually make it a priority. "They want to hire Black, Indigenous and people of colour or women in leadership, but when the positions come up, they are time-crunched to hire someone.

"We are now finding the tools to make it happen," she said, "but I don't feel this conversation would have been possible prior to 2021."

And until action is taken at the leadership level, "We're not going to move the needle on this," stated Bateman. Effective inclusion

consists of engagement in the everyday, not hosting the occasional workshop.

Johnson noted that while there have been advances in the racial and gay communities, "disability is often just kind of forgotten." She explained that a large portion of disabled individuals do not feel comfortable disclosing their situation and as a result "spend mental energy hiding who they are." Not only does this impact their productivity, it also takes a toll on their mental health.

There is a need for more discussions like this one so workplaces become safe spaces where all feel they belong. "If we don't start practicing, we'll never get good at this," said Malo. ■

For information on McGill's PowerSkills Career Summit, visit <https://powerskills.scs.mcgill.ca>.

EmploymentWorks Canada seeks new participants

by *Randy Pinsky*

EmploymentWorks Canada is a federally-funded program offered through the Miriam Foundation that prepares neurodiverse adults for employment. They are currently enrolling participants in French and English for a winter program scheduled to start sometime between the end of November and early January. A spring session is also being planned.

This three-month program is offered in-person, online or in a hybrid format. It is designed to bring together participants two to three times a week for a total of six hours a week over 12 weeks. Through discussions and activities, participants "get to know themselves better and learn what their strengths, values and likes are, and what they can do in the world," said program coordinator, Martine Kurtzweg.

Since its launch in 2017, the pre-employment initiative has offered eight program cycles to 70 young autistic adults, boost-

ing their employment potential with job coaching and hands-on work experience. Over half of them have since landed employment opportunities or have continued in school, according to the program coordinator.

An interactive mix of structured learning with role playing and "job sampling" allows participants to explore a variety of work environments. EmploymentWorks has partnered with more than 25 local businesses and organizations including Desjardins, Air Canada and The Depot Community Food Centre in support of inclusive workplaces. In a video testimonial, participant Robert Girolami shared, "the 12-week program has allowed me to gain new skills and tools which will help me find the perfect job...and be ready for the workforce." He continued, "I am ready for the next chapter in my life." ■

For information, visit <https://employment-works.ca>.



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Circles of Support respond to parents' fears, child's dreams

by Wendy Singer

One of the most troubling questions that occupies the mind of a parent of a person with a disability is, "What will happen to my child (young or adult) when I am not here or able to care for them?" This includes, "Where will they live, who will take care of them and understand their needs the way I do?"

Creating a "Circle of Support," also known as "Circle of Friends" or "Support Network," is one way that many families are addressing these questions. Simply put, these models start with the person at the centre (the focus person) and use their network to form circles of individuals who, together, provide support over the individual's life-span. Members of a circle usually include people that have developed a relationship with the person at the centre, be it a friend, teacher, therapist, neighbor, co-worker or relative. Support

provided can range from day-to-day issues, staying at a friend's home for a weekend, finding resources and living arrangements to planning in the event that something happens to the parents. Most uniquely, the network aims to build supportive friendships and relationships with the focus person, listen deeply to their dreams and find ways to realize them.

A brief history of Circles of Support

Judith Snow and Marsha Forest, both life-long advocates for inclusion, introduced their model of Circles of Support to Canadians in the 1980s. Snow had a master's degree in clinical psychology from Toronto's York University and founded the university's Centre for Handicapped Students.

After graduating in 1976, her mobility deteriorated and by 1978 she was only able to maneuver her wheelchair with her thumb. Snow had multiple diagnoses, including congenital progressive atrophy of the skeletal muscles due to spinal muscular atrophy.

Forest, Snow and Jack Pearpoint, president of Inclusion Press, created Snow's Circle of Support to ensure she was able to live independently with her care team and fulfill her dreams, from marriage to spiritual, social, art, relaxation and health. The result was Snow's ability to fulfill her life vision and provide a model of support that people replicate worldwide. (Read more about Snow's life story on p. 38).

Circles of Support: Moving from exchange to participation

In Snow's book *What's Really Worth Doing and How To Do It* (published by Inclusion Press in 1994), which she typed with her mouth using a breath operated Morse Code system, she shares a diagram of four concentric circles that represent the various types of relationships in our lives. These circles are:

- 1. Intimacy:** People or things closest to you that you could not imagine your life without, such as family, pets, computer, smart phone.
- 2. Friendship:** Good friends and relatives who you enjoy socializing with.
- 3. Participation:** People you interact with in groups, organizations, clubs or work colleagues.

4. Economic exchange: People you pay to be in your life, such as a therapist, hair-dresser or accountant.

Snow explained these circles: "When someone has been labeled into the 'special' world we see a very different pattern emerge in their relationships. In circle two there will usually be fewer people, often none or one or two. In the third circle again there will usually be none or one or two. There will be an explosion in the fourth circle with more than 10, often more than 30 people paid to be in this person's life. As the third circle remains barren, the person gains no new relationships, interests or opportuni-

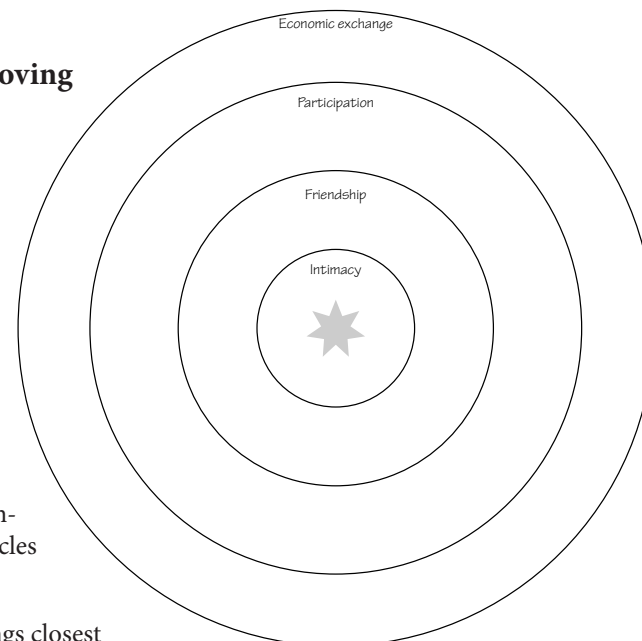


Image: Inclusion Press ©2015 |

ties from which to build a fulfilling circle of close friendship and intimacy."

Circles of Support address this imbalance and help the person at the centre participate in community life where they contribute and are appreciated for their gifts, enabling them to develop and expand relationships in the other circles.

▶ Continued on p. 13



Judith Snow.
Photo: Inclusion Press

◀ Continued from p. 12

A paradigm shift from disability to giftedness

Circles of Support not only provide the space for a person to share their dreams (“Inclusion holds the fundamental that all people are dreamers,” wrote Snow), they shift the conversation away from deficits and towards each person’s unique gifts.

Wrote Snow: “Believing in disability allows us to have assumptions that people are hampered by limitations. In disability, resources are expended to overcome limitations, creating much activity but no participation. In Giftedness, resources are directed to foster participation.”

Mike Green, a student of Snow’s, supported her during the writing of *What’s Really Worth Doing and How To Do It*. A father of a child with a disability, he added: “People labeled with disabilities and their loved ones are often so conditioned by the disability paradigm that they cannot see gifts or possibilities. It can feel impractical, embarrassing or foolish to have dreams for a ‘labeled’ loved one who is surrounded by case workers and plans. When people begin to see gifts and begin to participate in the Giftedness paradigm, it is as though a fog has lifted from their eyes. To see gifts after being conditioned to see only deficits and problems is a wrenching, heart opening experience. This different view leads to a

new world, it is as simple as a new pair of glasses. We see what we believe.”

How to begin a Circle

1. Find a facilitator who will:

- › Determine who the circle is for (parents and/or child);
- › Make a list of potential Circle members (Snow suggested 20 to 40) that the family knows and trusts;
- › Issue the initial invitations;
- › Keep meetings going;
- › Get back on track – in case meetings stop or the focus moves to “fixing” activities.

2. Circle members will:

- › Listen to the dreams of the focus person and find ways to realize them in whatever way is possible;
- › Plan for the future;
- › Provide support whenever possible.

Note: Not all members participate at the same time. This is meant to be a dynamic group that evolves with each member’s life situation. While supporting the focus person, members gain support and inspiration as well. ■

For information about Circles of Support, visit www.inclusion.com.

PLAN sets up Support Networks across Canada

Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN) is a Canadian organization established by and for families that is committed to future planning and securing a good life for a relative with a disability.

Originally and currently based in British Columbia, PLAN was created in the 1980s by Al Etmanski, who was the director of The BC Community Living Movement, which focuses on the inclusion of people with disabilities in community life.

PLAN’s mission is “to give parents peace of mind about the future, knowing their children with disabilities will be safe and secure over their lifespan.” The “Support Network” aims to empower people with disabilities to live good lives as part of the community, have financial stability, make informed decisions, find good places to live and plan for the future. As with Judith Snow’s Circles of Support, these networks identify the person at the centre of the network’s gifts and build on them.

Nancy Rother is a psychologist living in Montreal who, throughout her career, has supported people who have a disability and advocated for inclusion. She has been active nationally in the Community Living Movement and

worked with PLAN in BC in the early days of its development. The impetus for PLAN stemmed from the realization that the best way to ensure a good quality of life for a vulnerable family member when their parents were no longer able to care for them was to create a loving network of friends and family. “We recognized that the biggest handicap for people with disabilities was their social isolation and loneliness. Individuals, in particular those who were educated in segregated settings or worked in sheltered workshops, might have been learning concepts and skills but they did not have the opportunity to participate in community life where they could contribute and develop meaningful, caring relationships with strong friends. They were surrounded by service and paid relationships,” said Rother.

A visit to PLAN’s website will reveal innovative ideas, opportunities for training, consultation, research, publications and organizational support related to family leadership, social network facilitation, social enterprise, caring citizenship, dialogue and social sustainability. ■

– W.S.

For information about PLAN, visit www.plan.ca.

Building Circles of Support through art

Models of community care are evident through history, most evidently in Indigenous cultures. While Judith Snow or PLAN’s models take root in the family’s network, others can be structured in less formal ways.

Dr. Janis Timm-Bottos is an associate professor of Creative Art Therapies at Concordia University and principal investigator of the university’s engAGE Creative Living Lab. Throughout her career as an art therapist, she has developed a tremendous body of work that centres around building relationships through the collaborative creation of art. She is known for coining the term “Art Hive:” a creative, welcoming space that fosters inclusion, community, respect and learning through the creation of art.

Art Hives embody many characteristics of Circles of Support. They bring people together despite financial situation, age or ability. Timm-Bottos sees how people who might not otherwise have met can easily connect and support each other through a third element, in this case, art. “Healing, health and well-being are relational. The work doesn’t happen just within each of us, it’s between us,” she said.

“The studio relationships created are important and deep, but it happens at the studio. You don’t have to become best friends or be intimate with someone you create art with. But when you meet regularly with people in a creative space it’s a comfort to know that you have a place to go when you need help. It’s a deepening of the Circles of Support model,” said Timm-Bottos. ■ –W.S.



Melissa Sokoloff, left, and Natali Ortiz at the Concordia University Art Hive (Loyola Campus) in September.
Photo: Rachel Chainey

For information or to find an Art Hive in the Greater Montreal area, visit www.arthives.org.

Hannah's Network supports family, fosters friendships

by *Wendy Singer*

Over 20 years ago, Evelyn and the late Charles Lusthaus were invited to set up a Support Network through Planned Lifetime Advocacy Network (PLAN) (see p.13) by their friend, a former student of Evelyn's, psychologist Nancy Rother.

The Lusthaus' accepted Rother's offer, realizing this would be an excellent support for them and their daughter Hannah, now 44, who has Down syndrome. As the network facilitator, Rother began by recruiting people that Hannah had already formed strong relationships with, including her elementary school special education teacher Linda Mahler and her educator from social services Pamela Celani. The group began to meet and start thinking about Hannah over her lifetime.

"We can't just rely on social services to care for people with disabilities," said Lusthaus, now 75 and formerly a professor of Inclusive Education at McGill University and an inclusion advocate who worked closely with Judith Snow, the creator of Circles of Support (see p. 12). "We need community networks in order to give the person who's vulnerable the friendships and support they need and enable parents and families to be less worried about what's going to happen to their child after they die."

Lusthaus describes her daughter as highly motivated with huge dreams. The network helps Hannah find ways to tap into those dreams at a level that she can achieve. Hannah attended Elizabeth Ballantyne Elementary School and Westmount High School of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), John Abbott College's voca-

tional training program and enjoyed a work placement at Concordia University's radio station. While at the university, she fulfilled her passion for basketball by becoming the Concordia Stinger's much loved scorekeeper, a role she held for many years. She now attends the EMSB's Wagar Adult Education Centre.

Hannah moved back home to live with her mother during the pandemic, and dreams of returning to her apartment in Lachine. The network is actively working to realize this dream. They also have driven her to and from Wagar and supported her while her mother recuperated from surgery this summer.

The network has been "a life-saver" for Lusthaus, especially since her husband passed away three years ago. "I cannot even begin to tell you in words what it means to me to have this extraordinary support," she said. "They love Hannah, partly because she is a loving person, but people learn through their involvement and identify the beautiful parts of the person. This is quite different from a social services model, where professionals are trained to see the needs and the deficiencies."

To begin a Support Network, Lusthaus encourages parents to find a facilitator to recruit a core group of five or six people, with other members coming in and out as needed. Group size will vary depending on the needs of the individual at the centre of the network.

As Hannah's Network's facilitator, Rother initiates group meetings, keeps in close contact with Lusthaus to discuss any necessary action needed and advocates on the Lusthaus' behalf.

According to Rother, it can be very hard for parents to ask for help. "Reaching out reveals our vulnerability, and we worry that



Hannah Lusthaus, left, and Nancy Rother enjoying an afternoon together in September. Photo: Evelyn Lusthaus

what we ask will pose a burden to others. Having a facilitator do the asking can be a great support to families," she said. In Rother's experience, typically, everyone says yes!

"This is about being part of a web of relationships and engaging with the person at the centre of the network in a way that is reciprocal, authentic and deeply meaningful. All of us need to belong, contribute, be acknowledged and appreciated for our contributions and to experience the love and care which flows from relationships. In a network, we all have the opportunity for these kinds of enriching experiences," she added.

Rother describes the experience of being in Hannah's Network as deeply meaningful: "I love Hannah. Our relationship has grown over many years. She's introduced me to Zumba and Hip Hop! She enlarges my life.

And it gives me hope when I see how eager people are to help and contribute when we put out the call."

Lusthaus said Snow shared powerful words with her some 25 years ago that impacted her life and decision to start Hannah's network: "Judith Snow challenged me, saying, 'You don't like to ask for help, do you?' That went straight inside. That opened me up to the possibilities of support. After that I learned to ask for help." ■

To learn more about network facilitation, read Rother's publication *Reaching Out: A Portrait of Social Network Facilitation in Canada* at www.planinstitute.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Reaching-Out.pdf.

Listen to our podcast with Evelyn and Hannah Lusthaus and Nancy Rother at <https://soundcloud.com/inspirationsnews>.

Jonah's Circle brings his community together

by Wendy Singer

Jonah Davis Yanofsky's Circle of Support was created in March 2021, three months after his father Joel Yanofsky passed away at the age of 65. While his parents had been interested in creating a circle after learning about Judith Snow's concept of Circles of Support, it was the gravity of this loss that made Jonah's mother, Cynthia Davis, take action.

"I have the day-to-day plus the long-term concern about what will happen to Jonah if I can't take care of him. After losing my husband, I find when I get sick, even if it is just a cold, I start to panic about Jonah's future," said Davis.

Before she created "Jonah's Circle," Davis analyzed who and which organizations populate Jonah's four circles (Intimacy, Friendship, Participation, Exchange – see p. 12). She clearly saw the need to develop Jonah's intimacy and friendship circles. "Jonah has no peers who he can call, so there's room for improvement. Until a few

years ago, his intimacy circle included six family members. Only two, including myself, are still alive today. This speaks to the necessity of building a little village around him," she said.

An active 22-year-old who has autism, Jonah attended Hampstead Elementary School of the English Montreal School Board and Summit School. He now attends the Filion Adult Education Program of the Centre de services scolaire Marguerite-Bourgeoys.

He has diverse interests including outdoor sports and music, and participates in many programs, including the Centre of the Arts and Human Development and the Shira Choir.

Jonah's Circle currently operates as a private Facebook group which, in August, had 19 members. Members include people from Jonah's Exchange Circle that he has strong relationships with: family, trustworthy friends and a legal team.



From left, back row: Jonah's cousins Noah Davis-Assil and Emmanuel Davis-Assil, Jonah's uncle Sym Davis, Jonah Davis Yanofsky; front row: Jonah's mother Cynthia Davis and his grandmother Carole Davis sitting on a bench on Côte St. Luc Road that is dedicated to Cynthia's late father Alex Davis for his environmental contributions to his community.
Photo: Nigel Dove



Jonah Davis Yanofsky, left, and Jonathan Shrier enjoying a music session at Cynthia Davis' art studio in NDG in January 2021.
Photo: Jonathan Shrier

As the group's facilitator, Davis has begun introducing and engaging members online with Trivial Pursuit nights (a game she and her son play regularly). "Jonah is involved in so many groups, but the only thing connecting them was me," she said. "Now if something should happen to me, people will know each other and Jonah's connections."

Davis is figuring out Jonah's Circle as she moves forward. "It's a work in progress, but we're off to a good start," she said. "It helps me to know that we're not alone."

"The more overwhelmed you are, the more you need the support of caring people," added Davis, understanding how it feels to be completely overwhelmed. She encourages families to read Judith Snow's book *What's Really Worth Doing and How To Do It*, and analyze your child's circles (with a caution that circles can overlap, and it can be confusing at first). See where the needs are and speak about them with the key people. "This is not an academic exercise. It's something to do to help your child and gather resources around you," said Davis. ■

Being a circle member makes a huge impact

Jonathan Shrier is a member of Jonah's

Circle. A professional musician and music teacher by extension, Shrier first met Jonah Davis Yanofsky at Camp B'nai Brith's Avodah program in the summer of 2019. One evening after watching him perform at camp, Jonah's mother Cynthia Davis asked Shrier to teach her son once a week. "My friendship with Jonah blossomed and since then we've developed a close relationship that is focused on music," said Shrier. Together, the duo has written nearly 10 songs that express Jonah's thoughts, worries and what he's excited about. "Jonah inspires me every day to be better at what I do."

From what Shrier has learned, he is planning on bringing song writing to a greater audience.

Shrier describes Jonah's Circle as a group of close friends. "We meet and share information and the joy of being around Jonah. Between all of us we can always ensure that Jonah has a program to go to, fun things to do and people to talk to," said Shrier. "Jonah's Circle is filled with people to reach out to when things are okay and not okay, who are willing to step in should something happen." ■ – W.S.



by *Joanne Charron*

Support through shared experiences

Finding support: Where to begin? Sometimes it exists, sometimes we have to create it. We start on a journey replete with “we don’t know what we don’t know.”

The best place to start is in the health sector with a general practitioner and your local CIUSSS. They will provide direction and information on the support, programs and resources available to you given your particular situation.

Once we transition into the school sector we can seek guidance from the school administration as well as their student services and special needs department. They

will provide our children with the best support and programs they have to offer. The health sector and the education sector coexist and collaborate in the best interest of the child and family.

This process continues throughout the child’s schooling, transition into adulthood and beyond. It is a laborious process, one that we have to be on top of all the time. Through our journey we meet all kinds of people and families. We end up in a club that we might not necessarily want to be a part of but wouldn’t want to be without for only they can understand our realities.

These groups provide a wealth of knowledge and support; a small community that is with us throughout every stage of our

journey and with whom we create support that is not available otherwise – a group of people who fill the gaps of what lacks and doesn’t exist to meet the needs of our children as they age.

Nuclear families are in a predicament as their handicapped child ages along with the rest of the family. These families find themselves not only caring for their aging child but for their elderly parents as well. When we reach that point we can use the knowledge and resources we have gained in caring for our children in caring for our elderly parents.

The key to all this is to share our realities with one another and our families, and by default it creates a circle of support. By

sharing with one another, we help those around us who can learn from our experiences, and we gain knowledge from theirs. It creates a wealth of support and resources. It forges a path for those who follow in our footsteps, creates a better future for all of our children and advocates for their quality of life. It is hoped that this will, one day, be sewn into our national fabric.

Share your story. It could be a lifeline to someone else. ■

Joanne Charron is the president of The C.A.R.E. Centre and special advisor to Inspirations. Contact her at charronjoanne@gmail.com.

Activating a village of support

by *Sarah Lynch*

After giving birth to my first child, I easily connected with other families and established a network of parents who were also experiencing sleepless nights and endless diaper changes. We found a pediatrician, knew which mom-and-baby classes to sign up for and which necessities to purchase. Looking back, I realize how much support was available to new families and took it for granted at the time.

My son Kian was born three years later and was diagnosed with Down syndrome. Instantly, our network vanished as we navigated the unknown with limited guidance. We initially found support in a community organization, the West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped, and we also began to educate others about our family’s needs. While we longed for more support from the health and social services network, it was the kindness of others that got us through the first years. Phone calls, home-cooked meals, asking direct ques-

tions, offering listening ears and having a shoulder to cry on were gestures of support that we most needed and appreciated.

It took time to accept that “support” would have a different meaning than it did with our first child, and that we would need to create our own network within our community, friends and family. We became active in the community, were present with Kian at events and integrated him into the local preschool and soccer team. We advocated for Kian and educated others about his needs and challenges. We normalized the conversation, often speaking about what they may “see or observe” when meeting Kian. Other children and families were sensitized to his feisty personality; he was embraced as he warmed the hearts of those around him.

Kian put life into perspective and with that came our support. Our network grew out of our own hard work, while connecting with those who gravitated towards our life.



Kian LeCouffe, top, and his best friend Cassius Qadri playing in the front yard in the fall of 2020. Photo: Tricia Flint

We are grateful for our “village,” for the kindness, warmth and acceptance that surrounds us. We have people in our lives who ask about Kian and who ask how we’re managing as parents. Many compassionate people take the time to get to know Kian, to think of him and his interests and spend their personal time engaging in meaningful activities with him.

We have learned to accept that support can be demonstrated in different ways, by unex-

pected people. It is now our turn to be there for others, offering help to those cultivating their own network. Allow yourself to trust in the kindness of others and, in time, you will be able to build your village. ■

Sarah Lynch is a special education consultant at the English Montreal School Board and co-coordinator of the Centre of Excellence for the Physically, Intellectually and Multi-Challenged.



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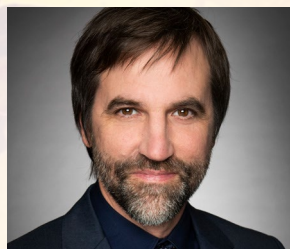
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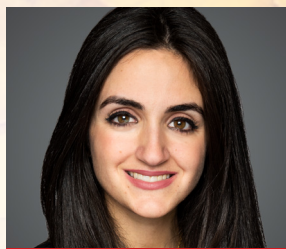
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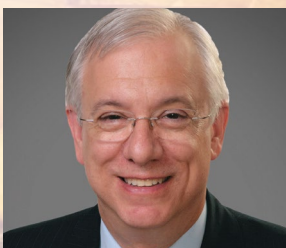
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Députée / MP
Saint-Laurent
Emmanuella.Lambropoulos@parl.gc.ca
(514) 335-6655



PATRICIA LATTANZIO

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Saint-Léonard–Saint-Michel
Patricia.Lattanzio@parl.gc.ca
(514) 256-4548



FRANCIS SCARPALEGGIA

Député / MP
Lac-Saint-Louis
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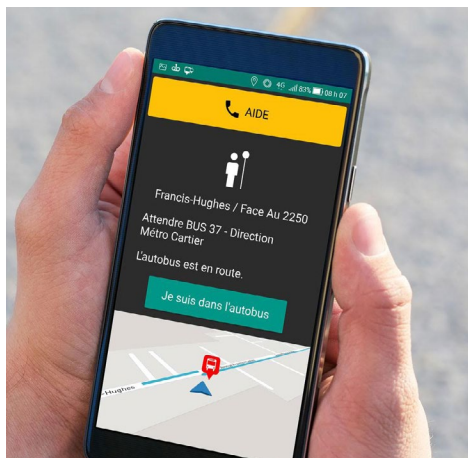
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Une application de guidage pour les transports en commun de Laval

par *Amélie Tremblay*



L'application STL Compagnon guide les clients avec des besoins particuliers.
Photo courtoisie de la Société de transport de Laval

La ville de Laval a de quoi être fière. La Société de transport de Laval a mis en place une application mobile qui facilite la vie aux personnes vivant avec un trouble du spectre de l'autisme.

« Pour une personne ayant un trouble du spectre de l'autisme, prendre l'autobus peut être anxiogène, déstabilisant. C'est pour conférer plus d'autonomie dans les transports en commun à cette clientèle ainsi qu'aux usagers ayant une déficience intellectuelle légère ou une dysphasie que la Société de transport de Laval a lancé [en août dernier] le programme STL Compagnon, axé sur une application de guidage. »

L'application STL Compagnon ne prétend pas régler tous les problèmes, mais elle permet à certaines personnes de voyager plus facilement seule alors que c'était impossible pour elles auparavant.

STL Compagnon préétablit le trajet que fera l'individu pour ensuite lui donner toutes les directives précises pour suivre celui-ci. Des commandes vocales et écrites ainsi que des pictogrammes sont présentés tout au long du trajet pour s'assurer que la personne emprunte la bonne route. Il est également possible de rejoindre, en direct, le service à la clientèle à tout moment sur le chemin.

Si l'utilisateur ou l'utilisatrice dévie de la route GPS programmée sans s'en rendre compte, un message est envoyé au service à la clientèle pour que la personne en poste puisse vérifier ce qui se passe. Au besoin, celle-ci communiquera directement avec l'individu qui utilise l'application pour s'assurer que tout va bien et l'aider à revenir sur le chemin préétabli.

Pour l'instant, STL Compagnon sera disponible uniquement pour une dizaine d'utilisateurs afin de laisser le temps au personnel du service à la clientèle de s'adapter et ainsi assurer un service efficace et sécuritaire. Si tout se passe bien, le bassin de personnes ayant accès à l'application augmentera graduellement. La Société de transport de Laval prend tout de même le pari que les utilisateurs et utilisatrices n'auront pas besoin de l'application à long terme. En effet, celle-ci devrait leur permettre de s'habituer au trajet et de gagner en autonomie.

Le maire suppléant de Laval, Stéphane Boyer, a proposé aux autres grandes municipalités de suivre ce mouvement et d'implanter de telles mesures dans leur ville. Espérons que le message passe et que nous retrouvions bientôt de nombreuses initiatives de la sorte dans les municipalités du Québec. ■

Jaccede.com : trouver les endroits accessibles près de chez vous

par *Amélie Tremblay*

Connaissez-vous l'application Jaccede.com? Créé en 2006, Jaccede.com fut d'abord un site Web avant de se transformer petit à petit en application mobile disponible sur iOS et sur Android. L'idée derrière cet outil est de répertorier les lieux accessibles autour de vous. Maintenant offerte en français, anglais et espagnol, l'application s'enrichit au fur et à mesure des années.

« L'application contient des détails sur l'accessibilité des lieux, des photos et des commentaires. Il s'agit d'une plateforme collaborative où chaque personne est libre de préciser et de détailler l'accessibilité des lieux qui sont en charge d'accueillir du public. »

En fonction de vos besoins en accessibilité (rampe, toilette, audioguide, bande de guidage tactile, etc.), vous pouvez trouver restaurants, boutiques, entreprises, hôtels, institutions d'enseignement et autres endroits où il vous sera facile de circuler.

Pour l'instant, les endroits listés au Québec semblent trop peu nombreux, mais il n'en

tient qu'à vous de changer les choses. En effet, Jaccede.com s'alimente par ses utilisateurs et utilisatrices qui peuvent ajouter des lieux sur la plateforme. En d'autres mots, plus vous l'utilisez et l'alimentez, plus Jaccede.com sera utile pour les personnes en situation de handicap. L'application citoyenne et collaborative permet ainsi de rester à l'affût des nouveaux endroits qui ouvrent ou des changements dans l'accessibilité de certains lieux.

Vous n'êtes pas en situation de handicap, mais aimeriez soutenir les personnes qui vivent cette réalité? Vous pouvez faire votre part en ajoutant des lieux visités et en indiquant leur niveau d'accessibilité. Ce petit geste ne vous prendra pas tellement de temps, mais il pourrait éventuellement faire la différence pour beaucoup de membres de la communauté! ■

Pour plus d'information, visitez www.jaccede.com.

Pour un répertoire local des ressources accessibles à Montréal, consultez www.onroule.org.



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Bercovitch: Rehabilitation takes strength, motivation

by *Wendy Singer*

Marlon Bercovitch was diagnosed with type 2 Diabetes in 2016. Three years later, when a horse stepped on his foot and he felt no pain, he was rushed to the hospital. He had two toes amputated.

At age 61, it was determined that Bercovitch had diabetic peripheral neuropathy. According to Diabetes.ca, this involves nerve damage and poor blood flow to the legs and feet. People with diabetes are less likely to feel a foot injury, wounds can quickly become infected and are more difficult to heal.

Bercovitch's medical roller coaster ride began after his initial surgery. His wound did not heal, he suffered a heart attack, had quadruple bypass surgery, and subsequently had both legs amputated below the knee. He spent 17 months in hospitals and rehabilitation centres, all during the pandemic.

In November 2020, Bercovitch received two carbon fiber prosthetic legs, built at the Montreal Gingras-Lindsay Rehabilitation Institute. Three months later, he went home, walking on his new legs. He continued out-patient rehab at the Constance-Lethbridge Rehabilitation Centre.

The greatest challenge Bercovitch faced in rehab was motivation. He drew strength from encouraging his fellow patients to try, to push harder.

Bercovitch is athletic and eager to get back to the things he loves to do, like riding horses and golfing. He will try adapted skiing and plans to join Quebec's sledge hockey organization. For him, walking on prosthetics require strength, balance and rhythm, all abilities he garnered from skiing. "They told me it would take six months to a year to walk. At two in the morning when the lights were off, I walked the hallways. I got into trouble but I didn't care. If they put the bar at six inches I put it at 12.

It's tiring, but if you're determined you will do it," he said.

Stairs remain difficult for him to manage, as well as finding pants that cover the prosthetics. While he says most people won't notice his legs if he is wearing shorts, some do and it causes them discomfort. "Having a disability makes you different. I didn't believe that but now I see it. People treat me differently every day. I'm not different than I was. I'm just walking with fake legs. If I can golf and walk, I'm okay. I'm alive and there's nothing that I can't take after going through all of this," he said.

Bercovitch is grateful for his four sons and his brother who are there to support him every day. At the time of this writing, he had a setback and was unable to wear his legs for four weeks. He was looking forward to going back to his new job and his continued workouts so he is in top shape for sledge hockey season. ■



Marlon Bercovitch on his first day golfing with his new prosthetics at Meadowbrook Golf Club in July 2021. Image from video: [Philip Bercovitch](#)



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In June 2019, my five-year old son Liam was diagnosed with POLG, which results in mitochondrial disease. It affects multiple organs and gross motor function. After five weeks at the Montreal Children’s Hospital we were told that Liam’s condition is progressive and ultimately fatal. This crushing news changed the path of our lives. Liam is now seven. He can barely walk; has autism and epilepsy. I became an advocate and created the Liam Foundation with the Montreal Children’s Hospital. We are raising funds to establish a research centre and for trials to halt the progression of mitochondrial disease.

In September 2021 we received great news. Health Canada has approved a new medication. The Liam Foundation will provide the funds for my son and five other local children to be part of this trial. It is our greatest hope to improve their chances.

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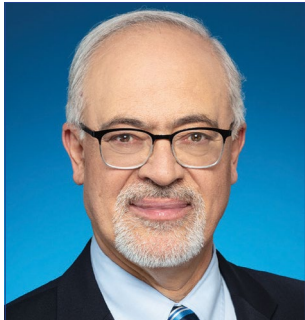
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Jennifer Maccarone

Députée de / MNA for
Westmount-Saint-Louis

514-395-2929 | f t
jennifer.maccarone.WSL@assnat.qc.ca



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Député de / MNA for
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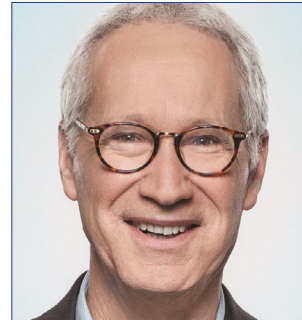
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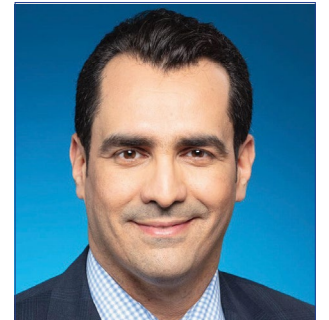
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Kathleen.Weil.NDDG@assnat.qc.ca



David Birnbaum

Député de / MNA for
D'Arcy-McGee

514-488-7028 | f t
David.Birnbaum.DMG@assnat.qc.ca



Monsef Derraji

Députée de / MNA for
Nelligan

514 695-2440 | f t
Monsef.Derraji.NELL@assnat.qc.ca



Enrico Ciccone

Député de / MNA for
Marquette

514-634-9720 | f t
Enrico.Ciccone.MARQ@assnat.qc.ca



Hélène David

Députée de / MNA for
Marguerite-Bourgeois

514-368-1818 | f t
Helene.David.MABO@assnat.qc.ca



Pierre Arcand

Député de / MNA for
Mont-Royal-Outremont

514-341-1151 | f t
Pierre.Arcand.MROU@assnat.qc.ca



Marwah Rizqy

Députée de / MNA for
Saint-Laurent

514-747-4050 | f t
Marwah.Rizqy.STLO@assnat.qc.ca



Marc Tanguay

Député de / MNA for
LaFontaine

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Marc.tanguay-lafo@assnat.qc.ca



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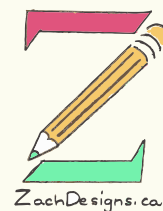
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by *Nick Katalifos*

Mackay and PEL students will soon play in accessible playground

Three years ago, students and staff at the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton (PEL) schools began their academic year at a new, state-of-the-art campus located in N.D.G. While the building was ready for learning and therapy on the first day of school, plans were put on hold for one very important piece – a fully accessible and inclusive playground – until now. Construction is scheduled to begin this summer.

In case you are not familiar with these two English Montreal School Board (EMSB) schools, I'd like to explain their mandate. They currently accommodate 189 students with motor, language and communication disorders, as well as students with developmental, intellectual, auditory or visual impairments and many other disorders or organic impairments. It is the only English-language school that offers specialized education following the Ministry of Education's curriculum along with a range of on-site therapies provided in seamless partnership with the Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre, a leader in physical rehab for children. The schools service students from all of Quebec's English-language school boards.

Studies have shown that play in school is crucial not only for the development of a child's physical skills, but also their imagination, coordination, social skills and self-esteem, to name just a few.

Full plans for the playground, which will be located on the school campus, are exciting to see. Each element was carefully selected for maximum accessibility and participation that engages all the senses while integrating and balancing colour, texture, nature, shade and slope.

The project is evaluated at \$2 million, with half already raised, thanks to a leadership contribution by the Fondation Sami Fruits pour les Petits, a long-time supporter of the schools. Accordingly, the Habilitas Foundation (formerly MAB-Mackay Foundation) has launched a major campaign, called "Every Child Has A Right To Play" to secure the remaining \$1 million.

The playground fundraising campaign is being co-chaired by Pierre Boivin, chief executive officer of Claridge and former president of the Montreal Canadiens and his daughter Catherine Boivin, a former student at the Mackay Centre School, who

is now 41 years old. "The Mackay Centre played a formative role in my early childhood and allowed me to make my first strides in life with confidence. I am thrilled to be able to contribute to the mission and vision of the Habilitas Foundation for a state-of-the-art school environment that gives every student a fulfilling experience," said Catherine Boivin.

The playground will allow our Mackay Centre and PEL students to wheel, slide and swing, to express their creativity, explore, engage in activities with peers, and develop physically, socially and emotionally. Most importantly, it will just allow them to be kids, and play, without any barriers to accessibility. ■

For more information on the "Every Child Has A Right To Play" campaign, visit www.habilitas.ca/everychild.

Nick Katalifos is the director general of the English Montreal School Board, board member of the Transforming Autism Care Consortium and special advisor to Inspirations.



by *Jennifer Maccarone*

Schooling is a right!

For parents of children with disabilities, school can be a time of stress and anxiety, with many unanswered questions.

"Will my child be able to go to school full time? What support will my child receive? How will I keep my job if I have to stay home with my child? Who will help my child...who will help me?" These are questions that parents of children with special needs ask, and they point to a glaring flaw in our education system.

There is a range of needs and many special needs students are expected to get their education in the mainstream school. But, untold numbers of these students are sent home from school without a plan for reintegration, and parents are left to fend for themselves. This form of segregation, discrimination and inequality among Quebec families must stop.

In Quebec schools, the number of students with autism has more than doubled in the last 10 years, representing one out of every 70 students. The number of students with codes and special needs continues to increase. The school system across the province is struggling to meet their needs, and some students are deprived of education because they are deemed too disruptive, require professional services or need individualized support.

To add insult to injury, no data is compiled to gain a better understanding of this problem so that we can work on finding solutions. I have asked the government twice to work together, to call on all parties concerned, and urgently study the situation to help these vulnerable students and their families. Twice they have refused.

An impromptu report, however, was released following my first request. Incomplete though it is, it states that in the past year alone, 1,500 students suffered a "service disruption...due to needs beyond the mission of the school and the organization of school-based services." This is only the tip of the iceberg. It doesn't take into account students who attend school part-time, often for just a few hours a week, as part of an intervention plan. These are students with disabilities, severe behavioural problems or difficulties functioning in school, sometimes even in a special school. These children were excluded from school despite the law, despite their rights, despite their needs.

According to the Education Act, a child must attend school full time, 180 days a year. The school must provide services based on the child's needs and not on the resources available. I know this is a chal-

lenge, but I also know what's right. Putting our kids first should be the priority. Not leaving anyone behind is who we are as a community. Building inclusive schools, teaching integration and finding solutions together should not be a dream, but a reality.

I am deeply concerned that if the government continues to refuse to study this urgent problem, more and more of our vulnerable children will be forgotten, and they and their families will suffer irreparable consequences.

Since I was elected three years ago, I have been working tirelessly to raise awareness for our families with special needs children. To these families, I say, as the new parliamentary session is upon us: You are not forgotten; I will not give up. ■

Jennifer Maccarone is the MNA for Westmount-Saint-Louis and the Official Opposition Critic for Diversity and Inclusion, Social Solidarity, Fight Against Poverty, LGBTQ2 and for People Living with Handicaps or Autism Spectrum Disorder. Contact her at Jennifer.maccarone.wsl@assnat.qc.ca or 514.395.2929.



by
Steven Atme

Artistic Heroes: The show that changed our atmosphere

Working from home since June 2020 has been an interesting experience. It felt good, however part of me missed being out and about. And some days, when I experienced technical difficulties with my computer or the few times we lost power, I'd get so frustrated I'd become the "Incredible Hulk." Nonetheless, that didn't prevent me from plowing through; thinking of creative solutions, networking and letting imaginations come to life.

Given the obvious global circumstance, there were limitations but that didn't mean that the arts and culture were cancelled. Only postponed. Postponed? I think not!

Yes, many artists missed attending events and performing in public. And many people went through dark periods and needed help. With these things in mind, an idea came to me. "Let's start a project that'll change the atmosphere," I thought. My idea

was to prepare a virtual talent show and give it a special title, "Artistic Heroes."

On January 25, 2021, my search for talent began. I connected with people from here in Montreal and across Canada, encouraging them to create a five-minute selfie video of any talents or abilities and send videos to me. I would combine footage to be aired in the form of a talent show at a later date.

Like the essential workers who, for over a year and a half, gave their tireless devotion to saving lives and helping the least fortunate who couldn't leave their homes during the pandemic, these talented young children and adults went from being artists to Artistic Heroes.

Five months later, on June 19, the event premiered on Zoom. It was an emotional day. More than 50 guests attended, witnessing the works of 21 artistic heroes that brought us so much light, smiles, laughter and tears.

We didn't know what to expect. But it truly worked. It was a huge success! We brought the show to people's homes and changed the atmosphere. Seeing the faces of those 21 participants lifted my heart. They couldn't believe they gave such huge contributions to society, when people most needed a boost.

Sending a huge thank you to the following Artistic Heroes: Angelo/Franco, Ben, Emily, Enoch, Gabrielle, Hannah, Isabella, Jessica, Lena, Leo, Luca, Malachi/Samuel, Maxwell, Melody, Michael, Olivier, Pietro, Ryan and Selim. I am immensely proud of you. Let's continue sticking together, and we can all be heroes, too! ■

Steven Atme is a pianist and composer, gives private piano lessons and is a public speaker, enlightening on his experience growing up and living with autism. Contact Steven at atmepianosphd@hotmail.com if you'd like to watch the video and pass on the positive vibes.



What it means to be an Autism House board member

After one year in operation, Autism House continues to grow and provide services, workshops, classes and private consultations to people with autism aged 10 and older and their families. The lockdown during the height of the pandemic didn't stop the Autism House team from meeting on Zoom so clients, families and the community could stay connected. And this past summer, its in-person summer camp was a huge success!

How has Autism House evolved and flourished?

In late 2020, it established a board of directors, 50 percent of whom are autistic.

At first, I wondered if there were any specific requirements to becoming a board member. I was working with Autism House for a few weeks, creating the "Special People Have Dreams" series on their YouTube channel. This caught the attention of several board members, and I was invited to join the board!

I didn't expect to receive this privilege. The decision for me to join was made based on my life's experience living with autism and the knowledge and contributions I have made to society from my work. I felt like I was being sworn in as a Knight of the Round Table or a politician on Parliament Hill.

As the official board consisted of people with autism, parents, educators and students, there was a sense of welcome and belonging. The meetings, held two to three times a year, where we discuss our annual progress, ideas and suggestions for potential projects, are very interesting. Voices are heard, concerns are shared and votes are held. Occasional debates occur but every statement made leads towards greater ideas because we learn so much from each other and are on the same page. Good laughs are also included!

How often do you find an organization with a board like this? Pretty rare, I would think. The patient, empathetic, compas-

sionate, open-minded and friendly environment makes the Autism House board a welcoming place for both the neurotypical and those with autism.

When we see our ideas come to life, us autistic members ask ourselves, "Did we just do that? Did we actually talk about it and make it happen?"

Watching results of additional activities, services and opportunities for volunteers and student teachers through social media brings smiles to our faces. Clients feel motivated with happiness.

Who would have imagined that this would all happen because of us – a great team that made everything possible – with many more great things to come. ■ – S.A.

For information, visit www.theautismhouse.ca.



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by *Wendy Singer*

Campers welcome the Clintons



Camp Massawippi campers and staff with Hillary Clinton (first on the left, back row) and Bill Clinton (seventh from the right, back row) on August 13.
Photo: Camp Massawippi

Habs bike benefits Summit School

Retired NHL agent **Donnie Cape** has called hockey legends like **Guy Lafleur**, **Larry Robinson** and **Wayne Gretsky** friends for as long as he can remember. Recently, Lafleur gave Cape a very special gift – a bike regaled with the Montreal Canadiens colours and logo, which the Canadiens had given to him. When Cape drove the bike around, he found people were

intrigued by it, and they started making offers to buy it.

Cape saw this as a golden opportunity to raise funds for Summit School. He connected with the Dilawri group, and they put the bike on display for bidding at 40 Westt Steakhouse & Raw Bar in Pointe-Claire.

Kevin Groleau, owner of Rockaberry in Vaudreuil, Kirkland and Dollard-Des-Ormeaux, bought the bike for \$2,000 and the sum was donated to Summit School. Groleau has been a mega-fan of Lafleur's since he was a kid. "I have a huge collection of Guy's memorabilia," said Groleau.

"Until recently, I knew nothing about Summit School. Learning about it has been very emotional for me," said Cape. "It's very impressive to see the work they do."

"We are humbled and appreciative that Donnie and Guy went out of their way to do something extraordinary for our students," said **Stuart Guttman**, director of Development & Major Gifts for the Summit School Foundation.



Larry Day (founder, Strangers in the Night), Guy Lafleur, Donnie Cape and Stuart Guttman at 40 Westt Steakhouse & Raw Bar in Pointe-Claire before presenting the bike to its new owner on September 13.
Photo: Maria Hinoporos

Camp Massawippi, located on Lake Massawippi in the Eastern Townships, has been offering adapted activities and services to youth with physical challenges since 1951. On August 13, campers and staff received a very special visit by none other than former United States President **Bill Clinton** and former US Secretary of State **Hillary Clinton**.

The Clintons are known for their affection for the townships, and with the help of local friends, including **Louise Penny**, celebrated mystery author; **Steve Stafford**, owner of Hovey Manor and **Jason Stafford**, manager; and **Jed Richman**, project manager at Camp Massawippi, they accepted an invitation to stop by.

Arriving by boat, the Clintons received a warm welcome from excited campers, staff and board members, along with Richman and **Clea Corman**, the camp's executive director. "Our campers understood that this was a very special visit. They enjoyed chatting and taking photos with the Clintons, who really took the time to listen and hear their extraordinary stories," said Richman.

In October, Camp Massawippi was half way through the renovation of its dining hall, and according to Richman, had raised almost 70 percent of funds needed for the project. Despite the pandemic, they provided over 500 camper nights for respite, as well as seven weeks of services for over 30 campers and their families at their day camp in Montreal.

Giant Steps Autism Centre receives funding

On August 31, Giant Steps announced that the Quebec government will contribute \$15 million in funding for the creation of the Giant Steps Autism Centre. Located in the Technopole Angus neighbourhood, the centre will be based on four pillars: an expanded school; an adult education and training centre; a resource and community centre; and a research and innovation centre.

"Providing higher quality, evidence-based educational and community services to more children and adults on the spectrum is an absolute necessity," said **Thomas Henderson**, director general of Giant Steps in a press release. "With this funding today, we are one step closer to making our vision a reality."

The Love Letter celebrates 10 years of I Can Dream Theatre

In celebration of the I Can Dream Theatre's (ICDT) 10th anniversary, **Merrill Matthews**, communications manager on the ICDT creative team, has produced *The Love Letter*, a documentary retrospective film that showcases the amazing work that the troupe has done over the years. Whether you've seen every ICDT show or you are a new fan, you will adore this film. It shows video clips

of current and past cast members sharing their favourite moments and shows, and the many ways that ICDT has impacted their lives. Clips are interlaced with the most memorable songs and unforgettable scenes from each show. Matthews has created an uplifting gem with this visit down ICDT memory lane. *The Love Letter* will be released on December 3 on YouTube.



by *Mike Cohen*

Report from Parliament Hill

Universal accessibility planned for new Centre Block

Whenever I go to Ottawa I always love driving or walking by Parliament Hill. Memories flow back to my much younger days when my school would go on a field trip to the nation's capital and get a tour of the historic buildings. Years later I began working for the Canadian Jewish Congress, an advocacy organization. During my decade of service there I went to Ottawa regularly and gained access to these facilities to meet with elected officials.

Work is presently underway to restore and modernize the Centre Block, the most iconic and impressive of the Parliament buildings. Today, the Centre Block is a busy construction site with lots of activity inside and out.

Work is being done throughout the building, but not all areas will be demolished or abated to the same degree. The majestic spaces in the main public areas, for example the Senate Chamber, the House of Commons Chamber and the Hall of Honour, will receive careful attention. Important heritage and architectural elements will either be removed and stored or protected and preserved in place while construction continues around them.

The great news for our readers is that universal accessibility will be at the core of the Centre Block rehabilitation. All aspects, including the corridor width, washrooms, lighting, acoustics, and even the choice of furniture are being carefully thought out to provide an inclusive, accessible and comfortable environment.

The addition of the Parliament Welcome Centre is key to achieving this objective.

allowing Canada's Parliament to become both more secure and accessible, so that all visitors can engage in our country's parliamentary tradition and democratic processes.

Transforming the previously inaccessible courtyards into useable space is also central to efforts to make the Centre Block universally accessible while respecting the building's heritage structure and without interfering with the operations of Parliament. The enclosed courtyards will provide the space needed for visitors to transition from the Parliament Welcome Centre to the Centre Block, and will provide access to the galleries of both Chambers. The courtyards will accommodate large elevators and offer wide corridors. With these new spaces, the number of visitors to Parliament will more than double from 350,000 per year to over 700,000, providing more school groups the opportunity to visit. Hopefully the COVID-19 pandemic will be behind us by then.

Building on the work of both the newly restored West Block and Senate of Canada Building, the Centre Block will offer an accessible, barrier-free path on all floors.

Accessibility through inclusive design includes:

- › Tactile Walking Surface Indicators at the top of all stairs
- › Larger washroom that include:
 - adult changing tables;
 - grab bars;
 - emergency alarm buttons;
 - visual strobe alarms.
- › Handrails for stairs that respond to universal accessibility best practices, potentially in addition to heritage handrails
- › Touch-free and power door operators
- › Inclusion of braille, tactile elements and/or Quick Response (QR) Codes on building signage and wayfinding
- › Service counters/receptions counters with lower section of the counter with knee space
- › Assistive listening devices for persons with hearing impairments.

The Senate and House of Commons Galleries, Chambers and committee rooms will also be reconfigured to allow for accessible seating, something that was not possible in the past. ■

Mike Cohen is the editor of Inspirations. He can be reached at mcohen@emsb.qc.ca.

The Centre Block of the Canadian parliamentary complex is currently under construction. Photo: Public Services and Procurement Canada



Running for office can have special challenges for those with disabilities

by *Martin C. Barry*

For most people, the idea of putting oneself front and centre and running in an election is enough of a challenge that most never even seriously consider running for office.

Now, try to imagine for a moment what that same experience might be like for a person with a disability – someone who does not have the same access to the electors because of stairs, broken streets and sidewalks or other obstacles that stand in the way.

September 20 marked the second time that Clément Badra ran as a candidate for the Green Party in the federal election in the riding of Mount Royal, after first running in 2019. In spite of his earlier campaigning experience, the second time wasn't much easier, since a physical disability obliges him to get around in a wheelchair.

Steps can be a problem

“As you can imagine, there are the obvious limitations – the logistics, for example,” he said in an interview with *Inspirations*. “Going door to door when there are steps can be a problem. Not everything is accessible. So that can be an issue.”



Clément Badra, who ran for the Green Party in the riding of Mount Royal in the September 20 federal election, is one of the few persons with a disability to take up the challenge of running for elected office.

However, there are even greater challenges for disabled candidates, added Badra, involving what only can be described as systemic discrimination, which forces them to work twice as hard to win a nomination to run for a political party.

“When political parties are looking for candidates, the perfect candidate in their mind is not someone who's blind, it's not someone who's in a wheelchair,” he said. “So, you've got to be able to show them that you can be a real good candidate. And it can be harder to convince them compared to someone who doesn't have a disability.”

“You have to work twice as hard because of the systemic challenges that someone with a disability has got to face,” he said. “As a result, it's a lot harder to get involved in politics because politics takes a lot of your time; it takes a lot of energy. So, you've got to overcome the challenges that you have in your life every day, and then be willing to go into an election or into the political field. It's a struggle and can be something that's very challenging.”

Although 15 to 25 percent of Canadians are affected by some form of disability, Badra pointed out that only one percent of elected officials identify as having a disability. “So, that's a huge gap in representation between the population and the political representation that we have,” he said, maintaining that the shortfall leads to public policies not reflecting the true needs of the disabled because of their lack of input.

To do his door-to-door campaigning in the residential areas of the riding such as the Town of Mount Royal, Badra developed a system. When there were steps leading to the front door, a volunteer member of his team would go up and ring or knock while he would wait at the bottom.

He said campaigning in condo or apartment buildings is easier as there's usually an elevator, and he and the volunteers can easily go door to door and floor to floor. The alternative is reaching out to constituents by phone, “but obviously it's not the

same as being able to talk in person with people,” he said. Other alternatives include organizing special open-invitation events, as well as meeting and greeting people on the street, although many of the people encountered may not be eligible voters because they don't live in the riding.

Improve housing for the disabled

Although Badra finished fifth in the election in a field of seven candidates, he said that if ever he were elected to office, one of his priorities for improving life for the disabled would be to make sure they have access to housing that meets their needs.

“It's extremely hard to find a place to stay when you're in a wheelchair,” he said. “I've struggled quite a bit with it. I'm lucky enough to have been able to find a place where I can stay. It's well known that having a roof over your head is a very structural and essential part of staying grounded in your community.” ■



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Koolway Sports coat warms C.A.R.E. client and many others

by *Cindy Davis*



Francesco Filippelli, a client of the C.A.R.E. Centre, wears the coat donated by Koolway Sports.
Photo: The C.A.R.E. Centre

Fourteen years ago, Jennifer Gallienne had a dream of designing and manufacturing a coat-and-blanket combination for those using a wheelchair. Gallienne joined forces with John A. Cook, whose background in international finance, risk management and marketing helped to develop a tighter business model. In the fall of 2009, they decided to launch Koolway Sports.

Based in Whitby, Ontario, Koolway Sports designs and manufactures custom outerwear for those using mobility, to enable them to achieve their maximum level of independence in all aspects of their life as well as in the lives of their families and caregivers. Their products include coats, capes, boots, mittens and more – all taking into consideration the unique needs of their clients.

“An individual with a handicap in a wheelchair – be it a stroke victim, someone with cerebral palsy or spina bifida – it takes great difficulty to dress them and undress them,” said Cook. “Often times, people might give up and say, ‘forget it, stay home.’ Our products are custom tailored for the world

of disabilities. We can dress anybody in any physical condition in five minutes head to toe, instead of 25 to 30 minutes.”

Each design begins with a personalized videoconference appointment, where the Koolway team can assess the specific needs of the client, get a sense of what activities they would like to partake in and the weather conditions in their area. Two more sessions might be required as a follow up where photographs and measurements are taken, then a 3D cut-out of the product is created before it is sewn. The whole process usually takes four to five weeks. “There are no two body frames, no two individuals with the same impairment and no two wheelchairs that are the same,” said Cook.

To date there are over 3,000 Koolway product owners worldwide including The New England Bombers (a sledge hockey team from New Hampshire).

The company has developed KoolGive, an initiative that enables clients to donate gently used Koolway products to individuals or organizations that could use them.

Enter our
KoolGive contest!

Do you know someone with a physical or intellectual disability who could use a KoolGive coat? Visit the *Inspirations* Facebook page. 'Like' our post about KoolGive and tell us who they are and why they would love a coat. Contest runs until December 7. Good luck!

Last June, Koolway donated a coat to the C.A.R.E. Centre in Montreal, a recreational and educational day program for adults with physical disabilities. Olivia Quesnel, its executive director, said their client Francesco Filippelli is looking forward to using it this fall. “Francesco tried on the coat on a breezy day in June when we were doing an outdoor activity. Francesco does not like drafts and usually feels cold. He loved the coat,” said Quesnel. “It was easy for the caregivers to help to put on and take off because of all the zippers and the way that it was made.” ■

Clinique N.E.A.T: Therapy in a multidisciplinary environment

by *Wendy Singer*



Francesca Dansereau (left) and Dr. Caroline Zanni in their new clinic in Montreal on October 21.

Dr. Caroline Zanni and her daughter Francesca Dansereau teamed up to open the Neurodiversity, Evaluations, Assistance and Therapy Clinic, also known as Clinique N.E.A.T, in March 2020. Due to the pandemic, the clinic provided telehealth services until June 2020 when they officially opened their doors.

Zanni, a neuropsychologist, had been operating a private practice in a home-type setting since 1998. In 2009, Dansereau, a PhD candidate in Human Development, joined Zanni's private practice and began working as a psychometrician and running social skills groups. Years later, Dansereau introduced Relationship Development Intervention (RDI), which is a parent-based program developed to increase dynamic thinking and independence skills for individuals on the autism spectrum.

Over the years, this mother-and-daughter duo realized that they wanted to provide more to their clients. “We envisioned a service where individuals could receive therapy in a multidisciplinary and multicultural

environment, where parents wouldn't need to be the experts of their child's conditions. They would have the support of a team behind and with them,” said Zanni, adding that the clinic supports individuals throughout their lifespan.

“It can be complicated and confusing when individuals require more than one type of therapy, which may conflict in needs, timings or approach,” said Dansereau. “By having coordinated efforts like speech, occupational and neuropsychological perspective under one roof, all bases are covered.”

They kept this vision in mind, and grew a circle of like-minded professionals to collaborate with.

Services include neurodevelopmental and psycho-educational evaluations, occupational therapy and evaluations, speech and language and psycho-motor therapy. Within the field of psychology, the clinic offers many different forms of psychological and psycho-educational therapy and

interventions such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Social Emotional Intelligence Training, the Social Thinking Curriculum and RDI programming. They welcome new professionals to continue to grow the services they provide.

The team of professionals meet monthly to discuss their clients' cases and ensure that all goals are emerging or met. “Intervention plans are developed on an individualized basis depending on the client's needs,” said Dansereau. “Working together, there is a greater likelihood of accurately pinpointing the challenge at hand.”

The clinic is a recognized Indigenous Canadian service provider, and welcomes young children, adolescents and adults of all nationalities. It is affiliated with both the Social Tree Foundation and Integrating Together Talent Placement Agency, developed specifically for job placement amongst individuals with neurodevelopmental conditions. ■

Mira dog joins the team at Galileo

by *Randy Pinsky*

Galileo Adult Education Centre of the English Montreal School Board in Montreal North welcomed two new students: Samuel Attias and his four-legged, chocolate-eyed companion, Dobby, this school year. Fittingly named after the loyal house-elf in Harry Potter, Dobby is the first Mira service dog to assist at Galileo.

The addition of a service dog adds to Galileo's newest initiatives, including its virtual tour and its Snoezelen room, opened in January 2020, which at the time was the only Snoezelen room in an adult centre in Quebec.

While the Mira Foundation is usually associated with guide dogs for the visually-impaired, it has been providing service dogs for people with autism since 2003. In Attias' case, Dobby helps with managing anxiety and sleeping. "Tak[ing] care of [Dobby] has given Samuel reassurance and a sense of responsibility," said mom, Thérèse Attias.

"Today Samuel is more receptive, more focused, less stressed, less anxious and more responsible."

Attias attends Galileo's Social Integration Services program (SIS), which has operated in collaboration with the Miriam Centre and CIUSSS West-Central Montreal since November 2020. The timing could not have been more ideal as Attias had just graduated and was on a waitlist for the Miriam Centre. When approached to accept a student with a service dog, "We said, 'with our current pet therapy program well established with our students, a Mira dog would be a positive addition to our community,'" said Galileo's principal Martina Schiavone.

As noted by Chantal Forget, head of the Miriam Center Community Integration Program, "It's a lot of legwork to get there, but when you have committed partners [like Galileo] who care about their clients, it can be such a meaningful experience."

Having Dobby in the classroom has also been beneficial on many levels. While Galileo students were already familiar with animals due to their pet therapy program, they need to be reminded to not approach Dobby as she's a working dog. Their curiosity about Dobby has helped Attias open up socially, noted SIS educator Matea Dixon.

"Her demeanor is always happy and calm," explained Dixon, "whether she is sitting at Samuel's feet and watching – or sleeping!"

Always open to new challenges, Schiavone is thrilled with how well Attias and Dobby have fit in and hopes other schools will follow suit. "At Galileo, adaptation and inclusion with our students is at the forefront of our students' success." ■



Galileo students enjoy their class with Samuel Attias and his service dog Dobby on September 13. Photo: Martina Schiavone

Wagar students walk for Truth and Reconciliation

by *David P. Stein*



Anna Persichilli's class poses in September in front of the mural painted by her students last year in honour of residential school victims and survivors. From left, back row: Jessica, Kessie-Ann, Branden, Terrell and Brian; front row: Matthew, Ellis, Jonathan, Jorden and Antoine. Photo: Anna Persichilli

To recognize Canada's first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation that took place on September 30, Anna Persichilli's class at Wagar Adult Education Centre of the English Montreal School Board did their own special walk October 21 in support of the Gord Downie & Chanie Wenjack Fund.

Inspired by Gordon Downie's devotion to bridging the cultural gap between Canada and its Indigenous communities, the late rock icon launched this fund in 2016 to generate awareness about Indigenous people like Chanie Wenjack, who died when he was 12 from starvation and exposure a week into his escape from a residential school in 1966.

"Part of Gord's mission was to make sure the truth about residential schools is being taught in schools. I teach adults with special needs, so I adapted the lessons about truth and reconciliation to their level. I also took into consideration that the stories may cause strong emotional reactions. Some students opened up about their own school struggles growing up with their disability," said Persichilli, who runs the Art and

Soul class as a Social Integration Services educator.

"When Downie died, I decided I wanted to do my part and continue advocating for this cause," she added.

Collectively, Persichilli's class was able to raise \$700 this year in support of the Downie-Wenjack fund, which strives to promote cultural understanding and reconciliation between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people.

"As part of 'reconciliACTIONS,' we've painted a mural, and the Downie-Wenjack fund even organized an Indigenous artist workshop for our students," Persichilli said of fundraising events from the past few years.

"At the beginning when Gord Downie was talking about this topic, for a lot of people he was just the singer of The Tragically Hip, and they focused on that," Persichilli said.

"He tried to bring attention to these issues before his death, but I don't think the country was really listening until we found the remains of the 215 children that were found near Kamloops, BC," she added. ■

Body scan can regulate emotions, thoughts

by *Danika Swanson*



The new school year is well underway, and with it comes new sources of stress, anxiety and uncertainty.

In past editions we've practiced paying attention to our breath, thoughts and sounds. In this edition, we'll learn to bring our awareness to our bodies with a body scan.

The body scan is one of the most popular mindfulness practices. It offers a simple, structured way to help us connect with and pay attention to our bodies. Like with other mindfulness exercises, regular practice strengthens our ability to pay attention to the present and has been shown to offer a myriad of benefits for mental and physical well-being.

In particular, the body scan can help us ground and regulate when faced with strong emotions or thoughts by shifting our attention to the body and physical sensations. The body scan helps us notice what our bodies might need at that moment – food, rest, movement – so we can take better care of ourselves. For some, paying attention to your body may bring up discomfort due to pain from injury or past experiences. See if you can notice what comes up without judging or trying to change it; research has shown that this may bring some relief. If not, you can choose to focus on more pleasant or neutral sensations.

If this is a new practice for you, I recommend using a guided audio or video so you can keep your attention on your body. There are lots of links at the end of this article to help you get started!

If you're leading for your kids, try to balance allowing time to linger at various body parts with moving forward so they don't get bored. Pause occasionally to ask what they notice, and offer words that describe various sensations ("body feelings") they might notice: hot, cold, tingling, tight, soft, dry, itchy, relaxed, sore, numb, etc.

- › Find your mindful position. If you're doing this before bed, try lying down. If you're doing this during the day, find a comfortable seated position – in a chair or on the floor.
- › Let your eyes close or keep your gaze soft.
- › Take three deep breaths.
- › Bring your attention to your whole body.
- › Starting with the feet, slowly take a trip around your body, pausing at each place

to see what sensations you notice. If you find points of tension, try to soften and release.

- › Move from your feet upward > legs (calves, knees, thighs) > belly > chest > shoulders > arms > hands > fingertips > neck > face (forehead, eyes, jaw, tongue) > to the top of the head.
- › Notice your whole body. Take one more breath.
- › When you're ready, open your eyes.

Danika Swanson is the consultant for the Spiritual and Community Animation Service at the English Montreal School Board and was trained by Mindful Schools to teach mindfulness to elementary and secondary school students.

Resources for guided body scans

Short Body Scan | UCLA Mindful Awareness Research Center (2:44)
<https://www.uclahealth.org/marc/mpeg/Body-Scan-Meditation.mp3> (audio)

3 Minute Body Scan Meditation | Fablefy – The Whole Child (3:26)
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihwcv_ofuME

Body Scan Meditation | GoZen (6:16)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=-dXiFBTWgTo> (video)

Body Scan Meditation for Children with Autism & Special Needs | Diverse Learning Hub (6:52)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B9MTNoVzgXU>

Break for a Body Scan | Center for Healthy Minds, University of Wisconsin Madison (8:15)
<https://centerhealthyminds.org/assets/files-resources/body2eC.mp3> (audio)

Body Scan for Kids | Mindful (11:39)
<https://www.mindful.org/body-scan-kids/> (audio)

The Body Scan Meditation | Cosmic Kids: Zen Den (15:58)
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TCUnEPeUQk> (video)

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How to teach emotion regulation to children

by Janet Perlis and Despina Vassiliou

In the earlier years of a child's life we expect them to be prone to tantrums, but as they get older we expect this behaviour to diminish. But some children continue to have a more challenging time to modulate and manage their emotions. It is a process that develops and increases across the life span, according to the American Psychological Association.

Now, into our second year in the pandemic, stressors in the environment are high for adults. This is often felt by children, and many are having a hard time managing their emotions. In order to help we propose exploring ARC:

Awareness: Help the child identify what is causing them stress by helping them identify how their body feels as they become stressed. Parents may use the zones of regulation or other similar programs to help their children identify how they are feeling physically and match that to their emotion.

Reduce the reaction: Their reactions may range from resistance (“I don’t want to do chores/clean my room, etc;”) to tiredness/exhaustion (“I am too tired to do any-

thing;”) to apathy (“Why should I do my work? School doesn’t matter;”) to boredom (often a code for sadness) to anger/frustration (often displaced and standing in for anxiety) to numbing out (often via screen time, escaping tediousness, looking for variability).

So, what can parents do when emotions run strong? **Connect** with them to stabilize:

- › Hugs: When your child flips her lid, it may be the last thing you want to offer, but it may be the thing she needs the most.
- › Mirror neurons in the brain assess the emotional state of the people around her and influence her reactions. A loving composure helps to return her brain to a calm state.
- › Positive time out: Before reacting to your misbehaving child, take a few minutes alone to calm down and restore your own brain chemistry. Give yourself time to access your rational brain before dealing with the source of your anger (your child). This can also be taught to your child when he is upset and “can’t talk right now.”

- › Solutions: Rather than thinking “what can I do so you’ll learn,” focus on “what can I do to help you succeed with this? What solutions can we come up with together?”
- › Apology: If you have flipped your own lid, a sincere apology will reconnect you with your child. Valuable skills can be learned from you modelling: Cooling off, showing self control, problem solving, engaging in emotional recovery and reconnecting after a hurtful situation.

Remember:

- › Your child may be trying their best, even if it’s not good enough. It may not be that the child is disobeying.
- › They genuinely don’t know what to do as they have not developed the skills yet.
- › They need your encouragement and support to get started.
- › You are not adversaries – you are on the same team! You need to work together even if this causes a problem.
- › Emotional dysregulation is real!
- › Finally: Don’t let your fuse get lit, and don’t light your child’s either. ■

For more tips, refer to Positive Discipline by Dr. Jane Nelsen.

Janet Perlis, M.Ed., and Despina Vassiliou, Ph.D., are psychologists at the English Montreal School Board.



A letter to acknowledge a child's efforts and promote resilience

by Stephanie Paquette

While a child may be having difficulties in school, they are cultivating many other skills that are helping build resilience. The following letter illustrates how we can reframe difficulties and reflect on them from the perspective of building strength.

To my beloved child,

I see you. I see that you show up to school every day, do your very best to pay attention and ask questions to help you understand. I appreciate your persistence, and I think you are brave. These qualities will carry you through some of life's challenges, allowing you to navigate obstacles and cushion your landing when difficulties arise.

I hear you calling yourself “stupid” when learning requires your focused attention. I see that it hurts you when other students complete their work more quickly or when they giggle at a word you have misread. I will continue to acknowledge your pain, allow you space and time to communicate your feelings, and thank you for sharing your inner voice with me. Your sharing takes

confidence, and I admire your ability to turn inward and assign words to your feelings.

You work hard all day, and then sit down to focus on homework at night. I see that you are tired, and I admire your resolve. You are an incredible problem solver. Despite your long day, you are calm, and we work together to figure out those tough math problems. I respect your relentless drive and determination. And I see that you are learning important skills that will accompany you when recovering from setbacks.

I see you helping your siblings learn their letters and sounds. This is something you have worked so hard to grasp, and now you are able to teach them what you have mastered. Thank you for your kindness and for helping them learn from someone they admire. You are full of love and are generous in the ways you choose to share with others.

You consistently push forward, and I admire your strength of character. Learning new skills can be hard and, in the process, you are sculpting your resilience. Please know that I am here as both a guide and a companion on your journey through life.

Love,
Mom ■

Stephanie Paquette is a behaviour management specialist at the English Montreal School Board.

DJ Sonic mixes it up at the Action Centre

by *Sonia Ruivo*

Jason Crevier is a student at the Action Centre, a satellite of PACC Adult Education Centre. The Action Centre is a community centre that provides programs to socialize, stimulate and educate its physically disabled adult clients.

When the pandemic hit, in-person classes became online classes. Jason's teacher, Andrea Pinto, reached out to see if he'd like to join a Zoom class. Jason had been isolating at home for six months, and he was hesitant to try an online class. The months of isolation had left him feeling fearful, worried, frustrated, and he admitted that he often felt quite depressed. After speaking with Andrea, he agreed to try one class. That one class was all it took to convince him that he would enjoy the videoconference format, and he ended up taking all nine of her classes.

Jason loves playing music. Before the pandemic, he had been Andrea's DJ for her Zumba class. He learned to use Zoom and was soon using the app to provide music for the online Zumba class, the Exercise-to-Music class and for class breaks. Within a week of being online, Jason was a different person: happy, upbeat, laughing, full of life and positivity.

Inspired by his love of Sonic Hedgehog, Jason gave himself a cool moniker: JaSonic Hedgehog aka DJ Sonic. He was soon playing a fun and diverse mix of music. As his self-confidence grew, he asked a fellow classmate to be his girlfriend. This sweet event was witnessed and applauded by his classmates.

In June, Andrea invited a Camp Massawippi manager to join one of the virtual dance classes. Many members from the Action Centre, including Jason, attend the summer camp. DJ Sonic and the enthusiasm that his music generated within the group prompted a request for his DJ services a few days a week during Massawippi's 2021 summer season. Even



Jason Crevier keeping spirits high with his music at a gathering in a LaSalle waterfront park on July 30. This was the first in-person gathering of the Action Centre members in nine months.
Photo: Andrea Pinto

though he was unable to attend in person, he rose to the occasion, providing music virtually from his home for the benefit and pleasure of the campers.

In June, Jason was thrilled and very proud to be honoured with a Certificate of Merit and Appreciation from the Action Centre, recognizing his skills and talents, as well as his spirit of enthusiasm, kindness and generosity.

As Andrea said, "With love and joy, a good teacher guides, encourages and influences from the sidelines, always allowing the student to be the leader of his or her own life." ■

Sonia Ruivo is a marketing consultant with the Communication and Community Development Department at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

Mobile dental hygienist provides service at home

by *Lorri Benedik*

Joy Maderazo studied dentistry in the Philippines before coming to Canada in 1996. After raising her kids, she studied dental hygiene at John Abbott College, graduating in 2010. She worked in dental offices for a decade before launching her mobile clinic, Tooth to Tooth. Maderazo has experience working with special needs children and adapts her craft in response to each patient's unique sensitivities.

She finds that seeing the dental hygienist at home often lessens the fear of going to the dentist and the different smells, sounds and bright lighting.

She offers these tips to parents:

1. Talk to the dental hygienist: If possible, children should tell their hygienist if something hurts; cleaning should not be painful. The hygienist can apply an anaesthetic, change their speed or pressure. Parents: Tell the hygienist what they need to know about your child. Then, if possible, leave so the hygienist can connect and build trust with your child.

2. Model the behaviour: If young children see parents brushing and flossing daily, they will develop the same habit.

3. Supervise brushing: Even when kids can do it themselves, stay close to ensure they are brushing well for two minutes.

4. Go electric: The rotation of an electric toothbrush is more efficient than the brushing action from a manual toothbrush. (A useful analogy: vacuum cleaner vs. broom.)

5. Say no to fruit juice: Juice promotes tooth decay because of acidity that erodes enamel. Water is best. Swish around the mouth after eating to remove food particles.

6. Motor issues: Some special needs kids have difficulty swallowing. Food stays between gums and cheeks. Rinsing with water helps dislodge it.

7. Sticky foods: Seemingly healthy snacks (like granola bars) are problematic. Teeth have pits and fissures where food gets stuck; cavity-causing bacteria can form.

8. Don't linger: Sweet treats and soft drinks are best consumed quickly. Enjoy and rinse mouth with water.

9. Saliva: When possible, wait 30 minutes after meals before brushing, so saliva can do its job of remineralizing teeth.

10. Floss at bedtime: Flossing removes bacteria and disturbs plaque biofilm. Over time, biofilm thickens to become plaque, hardens and becomes calculus/tartar. (Floss sticks are great for young flossers.)

11. Saliva/dry-mouth: Saliva production promotes digestion and the mouth's self-cleaning system. Some medications reduce salivation resulting in more cavities. Products exist that stimulate saliva production.

12. Cavities: The first sign can be tooth sensitivity but not necessarily. See a dentist at least once a year; x-rays, every year (or two) because tiny cavities between teeth are not visible – even to a dentist's trained eye. ■

VIOLETTE tackles difficult subject matter through performance art

by *Cindy Davis*

This past May, the Joe Jack & John production company debuted their newest show, *VIOLETTE*, at Espace Libre in Montreal. The unique hybrid production, directed by Catherine Bourgeois, is a combination of a live performance and virtual reality experience presented to only one audience member at a time.

A one-woman show, the story follows Violette, a young woman with an intellectual disability, through her personal experience with sexual abuse. According to the production, a startling 70 to 90 percent of intellectually disabled women are victims of sexual abuse at some point in their lives. Though a heavy subject matter, Bourgeois felt that this story had to be told, and that this was the perfect format in which to do it.

“Talking about that kind of subject on a big stage was not something that I could envision,” said Bourgeois. “It brought up the idea of making a more intimate, one-

on-one form of theatre, where there's a real connection between *VIOLETTE* and the audience member, as if it was a friend.” Using what Bourgeois calls “realist magic” in the virtual reality component of the show keeps it from becoming too graphic or disturbing, she said.

Presented by a female and inclusive team, the title character of Violette is played by an actor with a disability in both the French and English versions. Stephanie Boghen plays Violette in the English production. Boghen, who lives with Down syndrome, was discovered by Bourgeois during her



Stephanie Boghen on the set of *VIOLETTE*.
Photo: Michel St-Jean

performances with I Can Dream Theatre. Boghen feels that she has an important role in telling this story. “When I think of people with disabilities that are being sexually abused but cannot express themselves, I feel very sad and angry that this is happening all over the world.”

In addition to acting and being a student, Boghen is an advocate for people with disabilities and even spoke at a United Nations conference on the topic. She said she really connected with the character and

has a message to anyone who feels isolated: “*VIOLETTE* gives people the chance to know that they're not alone. Because I am a part of them, and it's really something for me to be someone that's beside them, through and through.”

VIOLETTE was also presented at Théâtre Gilles-Vigneault in St-Jérôme in September and at Le Diamant in Quebec City in October. ■



Feel the Beat

Return to hometown gives Broadway dancer new focus

The 2020 Netflix dance movie *Feel the Beat*, directed by Elissa Down, follows Broadway dancer April (played by Sofia Carson) as she returns to her hometown after a faux pas at an audition leaves her dancing career in New York City in shambles.

by *Ishini Fernando*

Back home where her father lives, she runs into her old dance teacher Miss Barb (played by Donna Lynne Champlin), who persuades April to visit her group of pre-teen dancers at New Hope dance studio. After spending years in a cutthroat industry living her big-city Broadway dancer dreams, April finds it difficult to relate to the residents in the small town she left behind. She is embarrassed to be back home and wants to return to Broadway. So, when April is asked to teach the group for a children's dance contest, she is reluctant at first but soon realizes it may just be the ticket back to her dream career.

Apart from April, the movie also gives insight into the lives of the talented pre-teen girls at the New Hope dance studio, as well as other members of the small-town community. Although the girls find it hard to like April – who proves to be a tough, strict and demanding dance instructor – they are determined to pursue their dancing dreams.

Among the talented young dancers is Zuzu, a deaf character played by the young deaf actress and YouTuber Shaylee Mansfield. Zuzu dances by feeling the beat in the music, which was the inspiration behind the movie title. In the film, Zuzu has no problem keeping up with April's difficult dance drills or getting ahead of the other dancers. The movie also seamlessly incorporates American Sign Language (ASL) as Zuzu's friends and Miss Barb use it to communicate with her. Refreshingly, the use of ASL is simply depicted as a normal part of all the dancers' lives.

Feel the Beat is a feel-good, easy-to-watch film filled with funny, earnest and empowering moments. While somewhat predictable, the talented cast is what makes the movie shine, complete with memorable scenes, enjoyable dance performances and lessons in kindness, teamwork and perseverance. ■

***From Behind the Piano* chronicles Judith Snow's Circle of Support**

by **Jack Pearpoint (Inclusion Press 1998)**

by *Roanne Weisman*

In her introduction to Jack Pearpoint's book, Judith Snow writes, "This just may be the most powerful friendship story you have ever read." This is not an overstatement. The book describes in great detail the strong and deeply personal friendship among Snow, Pearpoint and his wife, Marsha Forest. And there is more: In addition to being friends of the heart and soul, these three people collaborated among themselves and with many others to transform the lives of people in Canada and around the world who have been labeled with physical, mental or emotional "disabilities."

In its fourth printing, Pearpoint's book, *From Behind the Piano: The Building of Judith Snow's Unique Circle of Friends*, merged with Snow's book, *What's Really Worth Doing and How to Do It: A Book for People Who Love Someone Labeled Disabled (Possibly Yourself)* in 1998 (Inclusion Press). When she was in school, Snow was told to sit in her wheelchair "behind the piano" during school concerts. Pearpoint shows how we all have our own "pianos" to hide behind.

Recognizing "giftedness" – and including marginalized people into society rather than focusing on labels like "disability" and "handicap" – is what Pearpoint's book is about, and he skillfully convinces the reader to understand, using the remarkable life of his friend, Judith Snow.

A little bit about Snow: Multiple diagnoses, including congenital progressive atrophy of the skeletal muscles due to spinal muscular atrophy, meant that she could not walk or use her limbs from childhood.

Pearpoint describes that despite being forced to live in a geriatric ward because of her need for personal care services, Snow received her master's degree in clinical psychology at Toronto's York University in 1976. By 1978 she was maneuvering her wheelchair only with her thumb. She wrote by using her breath to activate her computer.

Pearpoint explains that in 1979, after being hospitalized for severe malnutrition, Snow arranged with her physician not to return to the geriatric facility, which she believed would kill her. Instead, she moved into the corridor of a friend's residence in student housing at York University. She paid for attendants out of her savings, sharing them with her friend, who also needed attendants. This system enabled her to continue to work as director of the Centre

for Handicapped Students, a centre that she had created at York.

But as Pearpoint writes, on the morning of March 6, 1980, Snow's arrangement failed. No attendant came to get her washed, fed and into her wheelchair. She couldn't phone for help, even if she had had a phone, since she did not have the use of her hands. An attendant eventually did show up. Snow drove her wheelchair directly to a colleague's office and said, "I can't do this anymore," after which she refused to speak. Pearpoint and Forest used a van to move Snow into a room in their home, and an emergency meeting of 14 of her friends happened later that day. She refused to participate. Pearpoint writes that they realized if they wanted Snow in the world, which they did, it was up to them. "We were all a bit frantic," he writes.

Within two weeks, Snow's circle of friends found her a place to live, arranged for volunteer emergency attendant care and

applied for government funding for continued attendant care, which was eventually achieved through new legislation in Ontario.

This was the beginning of what Snow called "The Joshua Committee," because it broke down the walls that separated people labeled disabled and the services they needed. Together, they shared their model of "Circles of Support" and helped to create government programs and funding for marginalized individuals and families.

Pearpoint's descriptions of Snow's life shows how she responded to her so-called physical "limitations." With her friends, she travelled the world, cooked and enjoyed food, hot tubbed, swam, canoed and starred in several plays and documentaries.

Snow passed away in 2015 at the age of 65. Her life shows us how we can all emerge from behind the piano and into our communities. ■

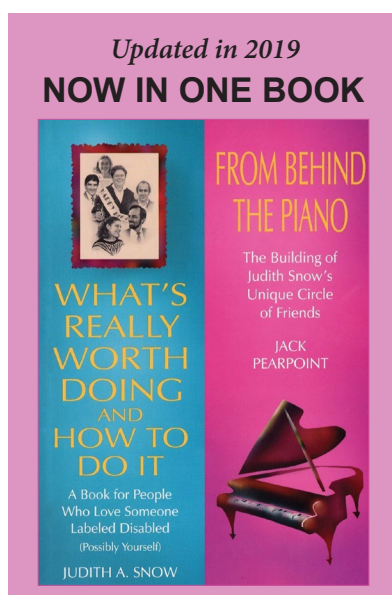


Image: Inclusion Press

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Just As I Am

documentary shows the power of music in inclusion

by *David P. Stein*

Montreal filmmakers Evan Beloff, writer/producer and Marvin Rosenblatt, executive producer, released their powerful documentary *Just As I Am: The Shira Choir* on September 23.



The Shira Choir performs with the Tamir Choir in Ottawa. Photos: Production stills from *Just As I Am*, Evan Beloff

The film chronicles participants of a special-needs choir led by Cantor Daniel Benlolo and its emotional two-year journey through a global pandemic that saw loved ones lost and lives changed forever. Benlolo is affiliated with the Spanish & Portuguese Synagogue of Montreal.

But Benlolo's choir also highlights the power of community, inclusivity, and of singing. "Shira" (or שירה in Hebrew) is a word that connotes singing and poetry.

"The documentary really came in and documented everything about the challenges, the trials and tribulations [of] what it is to have a disability. And to live with it. So it's a story about our participants, but also the power of music, the power of inclusion and the power of love," said Benlolo, who began the Shira Choir more than 20 years ago in Ottawa, naming it after one of his daughters.

The cantor's passion for singing is contagious, and his Montreal Shira Choir participants clearly fed off of the positive energy he brought during some dark moments, as can be seen throughout Beloff's motion picture.

"The choir became a staple in the community here, and when we got hit with

COVID-19, we did not give up. We continued on Zoom, and only recently have we started seeing each other in person again," Benlolo added.

"I think it's going to be an extremely emotional film for people, particularly because there are people who died during the filming who are in the film," said director Beloff.

For Rosenblatt, the film is particularly meaningful because it's a tribute to his late wife, Maxine, who passed away during production from a sudden illness in October of 2020.

"I was so compelled to finish this project because I knew it was going to be a tribute to her, but at the same time I believed it was important to keep working on it for a much larger agenda. I want to try and address the various aspects of disparity in government education that are not properly addressed at this time," said Rosenblatt, whose wife of 37 years cared deeply about the special-needs community.

"My life changed dramatically when I met my wife. And it wasn't just her physical beauty that attracted me to her. I learned that she had a special care degree, and she had worked with intellectually chal-

lenged students to teach them social skills. So that's when I knew that the person I wanted to share the rest of my life with was beautiful both on the inside and outside," Rosenblatt added.

The team of Beloff and Rosenblatt also pay tribute to late Montreal novelist Joel Yanofsky, who died of cancer in December 2020. According to Benlolo, Yanofsky's son Jonah is an irreplaceable member of the choir, and the strength exhibited by him and his mother Cynthia Davis throughout the documentary is inspiring.

"I think the takeaways are optimism, and people's ability to persevere. Humanizing people with special needs, and realizing that inclusion is absolutely important. You can see the beauty of these individuals and their families," Beloff said. ■

Just As I Am: The Shira Choir premiered at the Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue on September 23 and aired on CBC GEM two days later. For information, visit shiramovie.com.

David P. Stein earned his Master's degree in Journalism from DePaul University in Chicago. During the 2016-17 school year, he worked as a teaching assistant at Summit School.



Married Shira Choir members Adena, left, and Robert sing to each other on their anniversary.

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Quebecers Rivard and Lakatos lead Canada to memorable Paralympic Games

by *Jordan Stoopler*



Para athletes Greg Stewart, left, and Brent Lakatos stop for a high five on August 31 at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games. Photos: Canadian Paralympic Committee

The one-year delay in the staging of the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games due to the COVID-19 pandemic proved to be well worth the wait for Team Canada. The 128-member delegation left the Japanese capital with 21 medals (five gold, 10 silver and six bronze). The output placed Canada 19th on the overall medal standings.

Canada was paced by St-Jean-sur-Richelieu's Aurélie Rivard and Dorval's Brent Lakatos, who, combined, received a total of nine medals. Rivard, a swimmer, earned two golds, one silver and two bronze in the pool. It gave the 25-year-old 10 Paralympic medals across three

Games. Rivard, who has an underdeveloped left hand, also set new world records in both the women's 100m and



Alison Levine competes against Slovakia in pairs BC4 boccia at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games on September 3.

400m freestyle S10 races. Rivard's performances were all the more impressive considering she had not been able to compete or even race against teammates in practice since the start of the pandemic.

Lakatos's four medals, all silvers, came on the track. The 41-year-old wheelchair racer has now collected 11 Paralympic medals over the course of five Paralympic Games. Lakatos' exploits earned him the honour of carrying the Canadian flag during the closing ceremonies.

The other Quebecers to medal at these Games were Nicolas-Guy Turbide of Quebec City (silver, S13 100-metre backstroke) and Sabrina Duchesne of St-Augustin (bronze, women's 4x100m freestyle relay).

The Games also saw the Paralympic debut of para cyclist Kate O'Brien, after previously representing Canada at the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics. A life-threatening bike crash in 2017 left O'Brien with broken ribs, punctured lungs, and a broken clavicle. Doctors told O'Brien she might never be able to walk, bike or even speak again. Nevertheless, the 33-year-old earned a silver medal in the Women's C4-5 500-metre Time Trial.

35-year-old Greg Stewart earned a gold medal in F46 shot put in his Paralympic debut. The 7-foot-2 and 350-pounder from Kamloops also set a Paralympic record of 16.75 metres in the event. Prior to shot put, Stewart competed in basketball and sitting volleyball, winning a bronze medal with Team Canada at the ParaPan-Am Games in both 2007 and 2011. Another world record was earned by Victoria's Nate Riech in the men's 1,500m race, as he clocked in at 3:58.92, five seconds ahead of the second-place finisher.

Danielle Dorris was Canada's youngest medalist, with the 18-year-old swimmer earning both a gold and silver medal in her second Paralympics. Meanwhile, 46-year-old Para cyclist Tristen Chernove was the oldest member of Team Canada to reach the podium. He won a silver medal in the track individual pursuit. Chernove would later announce his retirement from Para cycling in order to spend more time with his wife and two children.

Canada's opening ceremony flag bearer, Priscilla Gagné, lived up to expectations, earning a silver medal in the 52kg Para judo weight category. The Sarnia, Ontario native became the first Canadian woman to win a medal in the sport.

The 2020 Paralympic Games featured over 4,500 athletes from 162 countries, the largest numbers in the history of the event. All events were staged without fans in attendance amidst an ongoing state of emergency in Japan.

Next up for many of these Paralympic athletes are the 2022 Beijing Winter Paralympic Games, set to kick off in March. The next Paralympic Games are scheduled for 2024 in Paris, France. ■



Aurélie Rivard wins gold in the women's 100m S10 on August 28 at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games.

INSPIRATIONAL EATS

by *Mike Cohen*

Duc de Lorraine

Every so often I wind up at a culinary establishment, where I ask myself the question, “How is it possible that I have never been here before?”

Such is precisely the case for the iconic Duc de Lorraine, located on Côte des Neiges Road just off Queen Mary. Since 1952, this truly magical spot has served French pastries, seasonal cakes, viennoiseries and macarons, using traditional recipes by the great French pastry chefs. Victoria Sørensen became the owner 12 years ago, and she clearly has the magic touch for this is a restaurant, catering service, dessert emporium and a pastry shop all rolled into one.

There are 52 seats inside and two fabulous seasonal terraces with tables separated by plexiglass for 100 diners and accommodates individuals with mobility issues. Then there is the bonus section, a series of plastic chairs and tables just across the street that were set up by the city but that

Sørensen and her staff maintain. During the COVID-19 shutdown it was perfectly acceptable for people to make a take-out order and then go and sit there to enjoy their food. Customers even sit there in the winter.

Duc de Lorraine is open seven days a week, from 6:30 am to 10:30 pm, and they serve brunch until 3 pm.

Start off with an Americano or a Cappuccino, then try some of their specialties. There are a few superb renditions of eggs benedict: the lobster version comes with two eggs, fresh lobster and Hollandaise sauce, homemade brioche bread, roasted potatoes and fresh fruit. There is also a version with filet mignon instead of lobster, which got a big thumbs up from my friend Frank. Michael, who has been a regular here for many years, opted for the Omelette Cabri: egg white, goat cheese and spinach omelette with roasted potatoes and fresh



Marieve serves up a delicious breakfast at Duc de Lorraine.

fruit. Frank could not resist ordering one of their critically acclaimed buttery croissants. Michael favoured a side order of sausages. You can also get pancakes, crêpes, French toast and more.

Besides a quiche pie, Sørensen sent me home with a package of macarons, a

selection of breads and danishes and a box full of pastries to die for: chocolate éclair, cheesecake, lemon tart, mousse royale and millefeuille. Needless to say I was thrilled to bring all of this home to share with the family. Drop by one day and take a look at what is in the display cases. It will make your mouth water.

Centrale Bergham

It was so much fun to discover Centrale Bergham for the first time. Founded 10 years ago in the Petit Maghreb area in the East End, this fast-casual sandwich restaurant now has 17 locations and is growing in Quebec and Ontario. Serving halal sandwiches inspired by different cuisines of the world, Bergham seeks to offer foods that all kinds of people, from all walks of life, can enjoy.

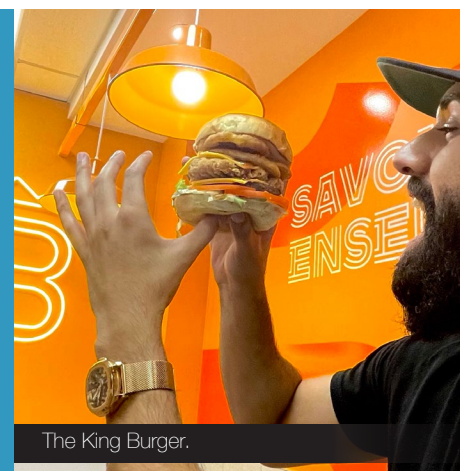
Upon first glance this looks like a fast food place. You order at the counter, sit down or take out. But clearly behind the scenes in the kitchen it is hardly that as everything is prepared fresh.

I went to the LaSalle location on Newman Blvd. It is a great spot for individuals with mobility issues as there is plenty of free parking in the lot, level access to the front door and all tables at the main level. I ordered the King Burger and, let me tell you folks, I do not want a calorie count on this one! Served on a bun, it features a beef patty, crispy chicken, fried onions, cheddar cheese, lettuce and tomatoes. And wow was this good! Their iconic flavours and

unique blend of sauces provide visitors with endless combinations to satisfy even the biggest cravings.

Marketing director Hira Khan wanted me to sample a few other items, which I had for dinner and other lunch periods that week. Let's start off with the sandwiches, which took two more additional lunch hours to eat. The Maximum contains Philadelphia chicken breast, two beef patties, beef bacon and cheddar cheese while the Philly Steak has creamy filet mignon, mushrooms and Swiss cheese.

Oh yes, there were chicken wings in the bag as well which I shared with a colleague in the office. She gave them a thumbs up. Khan also suggested a poutine. That



The King Burger.



The Philly Steak.

turned out to be a neat dinner side dish. They have six different kinds of poutines: Chika, Philly Steak, Merguez, Le Chef, Le Rouge and regular. I opted for the latter, which had the traditional French fries topped with poutine sauce and cheese curds.

Did I really need dessert at this stage? Why not? One was the chocolate nut and tiramisu with three select ingredients. This is undoubtedly a most extravagant

tiramisu. Both smooth and crunchy, crispy and sweet, you will succumb to its endless delights. There was also a slice of chocolate cake to enjoy.

Owned by the Genesys Restaurant Group, which also has Mont Tacos, Lokma and Fête à Crêpe under its banner, locally they have two locations in Laval, five in central Montreal and one each in LaSalle, St. Laurent, Montreal North and Greenfield Park. ■

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14 fun facts about **Simon Chang**

1. Simon Chang was born on October 12, 1971, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada.
2. Simon Chang is a multi-talented individual with a passion for fashion, philanthropy, and community service.
3. Simon Chang is a former model and has appeared in several fashion magazines.
4. Simon Chang is a successful entrepreneur and the founder of Roadrunner Apparel Inc.
5. Simon Chang is a devoted family man and is married to his wife, Lisa.
6. Simon Chang is a philanthropist and has supported various charitable organizations.
7. Simon Chang is a member of the Order of Canada, one of the highest honors in the country.
8. Simon Chang is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and events.
9. Simon Chang is a passionate advocate for people with disabilities.
10. Simon Chang is a member of the Board of Directors of the Simon Chang Foundation for Change.
11. Simon Chang is a frequent traveler and has visited many countries around the world.
12. Simon Chang is a fan of sports and has supported several professional athletes.
13. Simon Chang is a member of the Canadian Council of the Blind.
14. Simon Chang is a member of the Order of the Companions of Honour.

INSPIRATIONS
Celebrating Inclusion

Paul Karwa
From anchor to autism advocate

4 Paul Karwa setting up his new role as Head of Marketing and Communications at Summit School on March 15, 2021. Photo: Simon Chang

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INSPIRATIONS
Celebrating Inclusion

International fashion icon
Simon Chang

Simon Chang visits with Paragita Boushka, C.A.R.E. Centre client, and Chika Gussner, director of C.A.R.E. Centre on February 12, prior to the pandemic. See p. 6.

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Roadrunner's Sheldon Bercovitch
Vision and success beyond eyesight

Sheldon Bercovitch, a former model and actor, is a man of many talents. He is a successful entrepreneur, a philanthropist, and a devoted family man. He is also a man of vision, and his work with the Simon Chang Foundation for Change is a testament to his commitment to making a difference in the lives of others.

Lisa Bercovitch says
"Sheldon is a man of many talents. He is a successful entrepreneur, a philanthropist, and a devoted family man. He is also a man of vision, and his work with the Simon Chang Foundation for Change is a testament to his commitment to making a difference in the lives of others."

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The Simon Chang Foundation for Change
A hands-on approach

The Simon Chang Foundation for Change is a non-profit organization that was founded in 2011. It is dedicated to supporting people with disabilities and their families. The foundation provides a variety of services, including financial counseling, legal assistance, and job training. The foundation also provides support for people with disabilities who are looking for a career change or who are interested in starting their own business. The foundation is a member of the Order of Canada and is a frequent speaker at industry conferences and events. The foundation is a passionate advocate for people with disabilities and is committed to making a difference in the lives of others.

The Simon Chang Foundation for Change

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