

INSPIRATIONS

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Paul Karwatsky: From anchor to autism advocate

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Paul Karwatsky settles into his new role as head of Marketing and Communications at Giant Steps School. He is seen here with Giant Steps students on March 10.
Photo: Philip Ross White



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Editor's message

Mike Cohen

We are delighted to share this edition of *Inspirations* with you. It was prepared during the dark days of winter and into the early days of a fresh new spring. While our lives change daily due to the news the pandemic brings us, the *Inspirations'* wheels continue to turn and drive us forward, and our special needs community continues to demonstrate its resilience.

We thank our contributors for providing rich, relevant content and welcome

Editor's note

Special needs organizations that we profile in Inspirations are all adhering to the COVID-19 protocols. Many of the photographs you see in this edition were taken prior to the pandemic.

our advertisers, many of whom come from the corporate world. We welcome Henry Zavriyev, sponsor of our new entrepreneurial award, and applaud him for his vision to encourage individuals with special needs who are excelling in the workplace. We hope you enjoy this edition!

We love to hear from you. Send your comments and story ideas to info@inspirationsnews.com.



INSPIRATIONS

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Paul Karwatsky: A father's journey embracing autism

by *Tania Piperni*

Paul Karwatsky started working as a journalist at CTV in 2005 and became co-anchor in 2012. After 15 years with the media, he made the tough decision to leave and become more involved in supporting families with autism and raising awareness. Last year, he was named head of Marketing and Communications at Giant Steps, a private school for students with autism spectrum disorders (ASD) in NDG.

ASD is close to Karwatsky's heart. Both of his children, Brandon, 11, and Mia, 10 at the time of this writing, were diagnosed with autism when they were very young. Karwatsky has only recently started opening up about Brandon and Mia's journey.

Brandon was diagnosed at two-and-a-half years old when he went for a speech evaluation at the Douglas Mental Health University Institute. An ASD evaluation followed; it was "quick and shocking," Karwatsky recalled. Brandon soon began private therapy at the Miriam Foundation. Shortly after, Mia too was diagnosed with autism. This presented an immense struggle, one which Karwatsky realizes every family faces when dealing with an ASD diagnosis.



Paul Karwatsky at Giant Steps School on March 10, where he is the head of Marketing and Communications.
Photo: Philip Ross White

With time, things normalized, ASD became a part of their family experience and both children made progress with therapies. Karwatsky recognizes that this is not representative of all parent experiences; many are on long waitlists for diagnostic evaluations and public services.

Karwatsky is excited to now have a hand in building programs from the ground up for people with ASD, such as Polaris Enterprise

that trains adults with autism and/or intellectual disabilities for the workforce. He is planning and promoting the 40th anniversary of Giant Steps and is involved in the opening of the Giant Steps Autism Centre, a state-of-the-art facility specifically designed for people with ASD; it is planned to open in 2023 in the Technopole Angus neighbourhood. He is well-positioned to directly help families and liaise with corporate stakeholders, the initial motivation for his career change.

A generalist turned to community service, Karwatsky is using his public persona to directly impact families with autism, and is shaping his children's future at the same time. Without the late nights at CTV, he feels he can better support his children and focus on their challenges. "Over the last year, I have embraced the idea of neurodiversity as a father, and now it is a part of my job at Giant Steps," he said.

Karwatsky acknowledges the many challenges parents are presented with, including choice of school and whether to integrate their children in inclusive schools or not. The Karwatsky children started at Carlyle Elementary School of the English Montreal School Board. They switched to Summit School, a private school for children with special needs, in September 2020.

According to Karwatsky, parents often think the goal is to send their children to a mainstream school and integrate with neurotypical students; however that may not be the best choice for every child. He encourages exploring specialized options. "I realized there is a whole other community out there, a whole other way of thinking, and a whole other way to perceive the world. Recognize the beauty of being part of this community and the support structures that it provides," said Karwatsky.

So why share his story now? Karwatsky always thought his children should decide to

reveal their diagnosis in their own way and time. But he now realizes that not discussing autism openly made it seem as though it was something to be embarrassed about. "My children should be proud of how they face their challenges, and how they see the world. My children are aware they have autism. They meet each challenge, pursue their interests and embrace neurodiversity," he said. "There are fascinating ways in which my kids see things that I don't. This has exposed me to a world that I wouldn't be otherwise exposed to. A diagnosis like this brings you back to focus on what's important and to really appreciate your children, and prioritize. It puts everything into perspective."

"You may think that if your child receives an ASD diagnosis it will be the end of the world, but you realize you not only get through it, but you can thrive because of it," said Karwatsky. "The greatest lesson ASD has taught me is that the definition of 'neurotypical' is flawed. We all have our unique characteristics, and we all struggle in some way." Karwatsky realizes every family goes through their own process and must do what works best for them. His advice for parents starting this journey: "Know there is a huge community to support you that is ready to guide you. You're not alone. You will be supported throughout your life and that of your child. Know there is a significant place for your child."

"We need to try to understand each other better. We are all dealing with complex minds and are very different from one another, but in basic ways we are all the same. I approach people's personalities and quirks with more understanding and less criticism." ■

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

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by *Cindy Davis*

The Simon Chang Difference Maker Award

Nurse Stacy Baker helps Summit students stay safe during pandemic

For Stacy Baker, working as the school nurse at Summit School has always been about more than just treating physical ailments; it has been about connecting with each student on an individual level. She has always been dedicated to ensuring that everyone she treats knows that she is there for them, and that having to see the nurse is not a scary experience. From participating in school basketball games, camping trips, sledding excursions with the students or just learning everyone's name by heart, Baker has always gone above and beyond the call of duty to form a bond with the students.

When Simon Chang first heard about Stacy Baker, he was thrilled that a frontline health-care worker, especially during these unprecedented times, would be the next recipient of the Simon Chang Difference Maker Award. When he learned more about her, he was amazed at her dedication, kindness, love of children, passion and commitment, as he admires someone who willingly goes the extra mile.

“Stacy reminds me of myself,” says Chang. “We both embrace community and have an honest desire to connect with special needs kids and their families. I hope that Stacy’s story will inspire others. Congratulations, Stacy!”

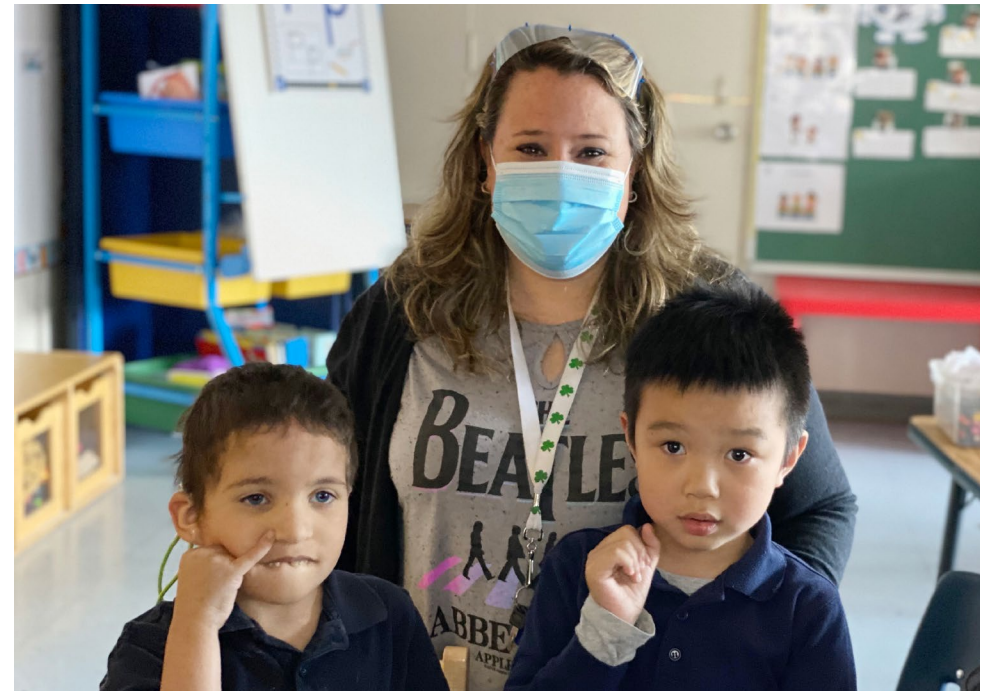
When COVID-19 hit, Baker’s role dramatically shifted. In addition to her regular nursing duties, she committed herself to ensuring that all safety policies, procedures and implementation strategies were put into place and that family and staff of the 680 students who attend Summit School’s three campuses knew they were cared for and safe.

Stacy Baker is the recipient of this edition’s Simon Chang Difference Maker Award.

“This is humbling. I’m totally blown away,” says Baker. “This award is for the whole school—the staff, all the families, all the students—because in a year that has been so over the top, we all just want to really make sure that the kids have the best outcome.”

Before working at Summit School, Baker had worked as a nurse in a pediatric emergency room, and as a special care counselor. She says it was fate that brought her to work at Summit School, after she connected with the previous school nurse while vaccinating her at a clinic. She haphazardly asked Baker if she would be interested in substituting for her on occasion. Baker knew immediately that the school was a perfect fit for her.

Though the job is demanding, and while this year she finds herself working “day and night” during the pandemic, Baker says she draws inspiration from the students, some of whom must manage serious health issues in addition to special needs. One boy in particular, she notes, suffers several seizures daily, but continues on with a smile and a positive attitude. “It just makes us realize that our problems are so little compared to what they have to deal



Summit School nurse Stacy Baker with students Daniel and Vincent at Summit School in April. Photo courtesy of Summit School

with. I feel like every single child here has their own way of reaching you if you take the time to really let them.”

Herman Erdogmus, director general of Summit School, nominated Baker for the award. In his submission, he describes Baker as a constant support for the school. “For the past three years, Stacy has been a fixture of support within our Summit family. Her smile, ability to connect with each student on an individual basis and handle the everyday challenges of a school, are what set her apart,” states Erdogmus in his nomination letter. “Simply put, she always puts the needs of our students first. We could not be more thankful for the work that Stacy does every single day.”

Dr. Leyla Korany and her husband, Dr. Matthew Oughton, are proud Summit School parents. They are delighted that Baker is being acknowledged with this award. “You made my day hearing that she’ll be recognized for everything she

has done for our kids and families,” says Korany, “I cannot express to you how much I love her.

“She understands COVID-19 and the health implications in such an exceptional, caring and forward-thinking manner. She is diligent and does everything she can to keep our kids safe. She has one of the most amazing senses of clinical judgment I’ve ever seen.”

Baker says she is honoured to be receiving this award from the Simon Chang Foundation for Change. She has long admired Simon Chang’s designs, and notes that she has an amusing connection to the designer. Previous to winning this award, the only prize she had ever won was at the age of 16 - a raffle at an art exhibition. “The prize was a Simon Chang wardrobe!” ■

If you have a Difference Maker to nominate, email us at info@inspirationsnews.com.

14 fun facts about Simon Chang

Compiled by *Wendy Singer*

In the Fall 2020 / Winter 2021 edition of *Inspirations* we featured an in-depth story about the Simon Chang Foundation for Change, our partnership with the Foundation, and the mission behind Chang's philanthropic work. In this edition, we get to know our sponsor, the iconic Canadian fashion designer Simon Chang, in a more personal way.

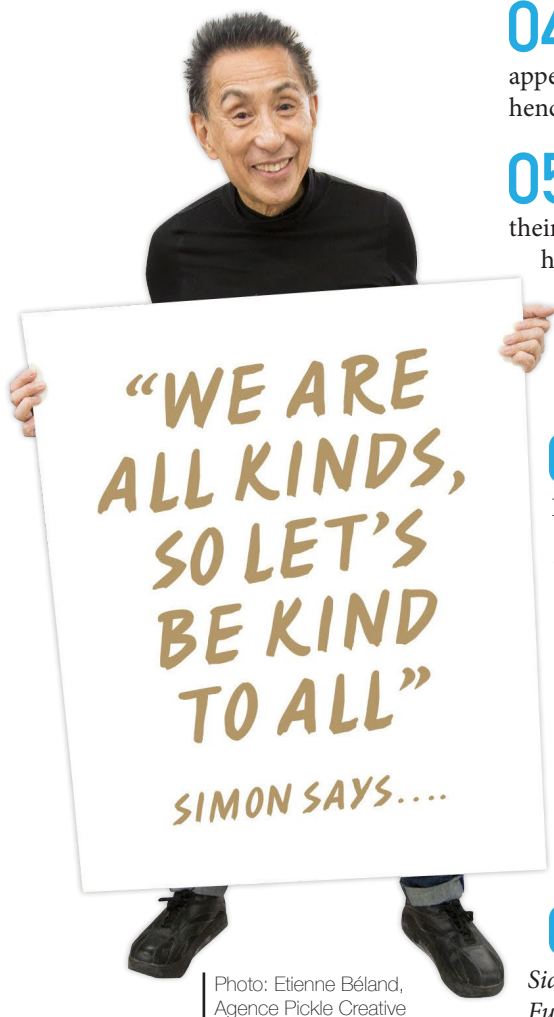


Photo: Etienne Béland, Agence Pickle Creative

01 Simon is a multi-dimensional creative artist with a background in graphic design, photography and illustration.

02 When it comes to his foundation, the Simon Chang Foundation for Change, he uses creativity and imagination to bring positive change. Simon has been honoured with the Order of Canada and the Queen's Diamond Jubilee Medal for his outstanding philanthropic efforts and social engagements.

03 Simon is a wanderer and an accidental tourist. He loves to walk and explore. He is more about the journey than the destination. He once walked from Nice to Monaco.

04 Simon is an experimental cook with a passion for fashion plating. The appearance is just as important as the taste, hence the expression "a feast for the eyes."

05 Simon loves kids. Children gravitate towards him, and he truly loves their innocence and spontaneity. Perhaps he connects with them because he is still a big kid at heart. Simon believes, like Whitney Houston sang, children are our future and if we teach them well, they will lead the way.

06 Simon is passionate about music and has a diverse collection. His media players are always on shuffle and he loves to pump up the volume, both in music and in life. For Simon, music sets the mood but the lyrics tell the story. While he's into all kinds of music, he loves Broadway musicals, especially *A Chorus Line* and its song, "What I did for love" as it reflects his life's passion: "If I had to stop designing... How would I feel? It would be just like the lyrics of the song!" he said.

07 Simon loves films (Hitchcock, musicals like *My Fair Lady*, *West Side Story*, *The Sound of Music*, *Gypsy*, *Funny Girl*, *Hair*...) and relates to all the

visual aspects of filmmaking. He is often inspired to reenact some of his favourite film moments in real life. Does life imitate art or art imitate life?

08 Simon is a magician when it comes to accessorizing. It's about creating illusion. He loves the magical effect of taking the simplest outfit and making it "wow." He is quick to remind everyone that the best accessory of all is a smile.

09 Simon is always camera ready. Life is a big picture made up of millions of tiny pixels, and he loves to connect the dots. He is always optimistic...ready for his close-up and ready for any challenge life presents. This life philosophy keeps Simon self-assured and happy-go-lucky.

10 Simon loves his own company. He is comfortable with solitude. The peacefulness frees his mind and keeps him very open. He is a singular thinker. It may appear egocentric to some but it is really just about being responsible for his own happiness.

11 Simon has a "no excuse" exercise regime. He practices the "Five Tibetan Rites," which some people call the fountain of youth because it is believed to increase your life force energy and improve your vitality.

12 Simon loves the sound of wind chimes. For him, it stimulates a powerful sensation of a soothing breeze that cools his body and mind allowing him to feel calm and refreshed.

13 Simon carries Tim Hortons' gift cards, and anonymously gives them away to people who are down on their luck. This began one holiday season several years ago but one day a homeless man said, "With this card I have a reason to be in Tim's and I can warm-up." Simon now gives gift cards all year-round.

14 Simon is launching a new website! Drop by www.simonchang.com to learn more. ■



Exploring Montreal's Jean Talon Market. Photo: Etienne Béland, Agence Pickle Creative



Simon wearing his apron "Born to Chop" in his showroom. Photo: Etienne Béland, Agence Pickle Creative



On a visit to the Mackay Centre School in February 2020, Simon had fun creating with student Vincenzo

Awesome parents

by *Lorri Benedik*

Parents of special needs kids are shapeshifters, morphing seamlessly from teacher to advocate to best friend. The rewards defy description. When my son, who has autism, was six, he said, "Mom, I love you more than you love me." I explained that it was impossible because I loved him more than the universe as I had since before he was born. "Well, I loved you then too," he insisted. Meet a couple of remarkable Montreal parents.

Wendy Zaritsky

In her first year of life, Alex Garish was meeting most developmental targets but her parents, Wendy Zaritsky and Peter Garish, knew something was not quite right. "She walked at 11 months but rarely made eye contact," said Zaritsky. "We thought she might be deaf, but test results showed that her hearing was fine." They were referred to the child development program at the Montreal Children's Hospital. "Alex was two years old and I was nine-months pregnant with our son Max when we received her diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder," she continued. "We knew little about it but did research and vowed to provide our daughter with whatever she needed."

Alex started private sessions of behavioural, speech and occupational therapies. "We are not wealthy so we applied for funds everywhere," Zaritsky said. "We received a grant from Loblaws and registered for services from our local CLSC." When she was four, Alex was accepted at Giant Steps School and stayed until age nine when she moved to Summit School. Zaritsky joined the parent committee immediately.

Today, Alex, 16, continues to thrive at Summit. She loves swimming, arts & crafts, plays piano and wows everyone with her phenomenal memory. Zaritsky now chairs the parent committee and excels at fundraising. She works closely with a great group of parent volunteers, selling Summit swag and organizing pizza lunches and holiday raffles. At Christmastime, Zaritsky and her husband dress up as Santa and elf to bring joy and gifts to the students and teachers of Summit School.



Alex Garish (left) with Peter Garish (Santa) and Wendy Zaritsky (elf) at Summit School in December 2019. Photo courtesy of Wendy Zaritsky

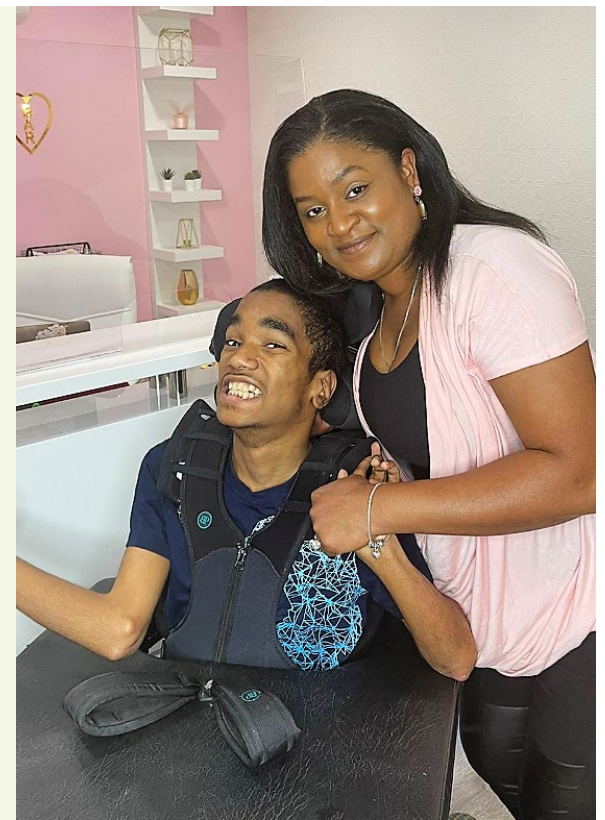
Katia René

In 1997, Katia René had two young children when she went into premature labour with her third. Shyheim Ramdhaney was born, by C-section, at 31 weeks. "They kept him in the neonatal intensive care unit (Jewish General) and two weeks later, because of severe jaundice, transported him to the Montreal Children's for a blood exchange," said René. "After the procedure, he developed apnea and would sometimes stop breathing." When Ramdhaney was five months old, René recalls they were in the metro, and he just started screaming. "I took him to The Children's. His diagnosis was cerebral palsy with severe spasticity, dystonia and quadriplegia," René said. "It was a shock but I never doubted that, with help from my mother and sister, I could take care of Shyheim and keep living my life."

René, who is a single mom, had envisioned owning a home before age 30 and finding a good job. When she was 29, they moved into their house in Châteauguay, and 10 years ago she started a career she enjoys, driving a Montreal city bus.

Ramdhaney attended the Mackay Centre School from age four to 21. He loved being hallway patrol monitor and adored volunteering in the kindergarten. Three years ago, the Mackay staff bid a teary farewell to Ramdhaney at his graduation. He now attends the C.A.R.E. Centre (Centre d'activités récréatives et éducatives) and has mastered the sip-and-puff method of maneuvering a computer mouse. He enjoys Facebook and YouTube.

"Hope Burton works at Mackay; she has become a close friend and is a godsend," said René. "Early each morning I drive



Shyheim Ramdhaney (left) and his mother Katia René enjoying an afternoon visiting her daughter's salon Princesse Beauty Bar in Châteauguay on March 12. Photo: Princesse Ramdhaney

Shyheim to C.A.R.E. and then drive to Mackay, where I exchange vehicles with Hope. She picks Shyheim up after school, brings him to our place and stays with him until I get home at suppertime."

"There are challenges caring for Shyheim, but he takes care of me too," René said. "If he sees me crying he'll say, 'Don't worry, Mom. I am strong and will be okay.' Taking her son to appointments, René sometimes has to stop traffic, for a moment, to get him out of the van. "Impatient drivers start honking and Shyheim asks why. I say, 'They are honking because you are a king.' His face lights up with a beautiful smile." ■

Tell us about your awesome parent at info@inspirationsnews.com.

Liam: A mighty mito-warrior

by *Lorri Benedik*

“ The other day, I was sitting on the couch and he spontaneously came over, snuggled up close to me and fell asleep. I just love him so much.”
– Emily Reason

In October 2013, Kevin Reason and Laurie Walker welcomed Liam into the world – a baby brother for Reason’s 14-year-old daughter, Emily. Liam was healthy and happy, but as he grew from infant to toddler his parents noticed delays reaching developmental milestones. Liam took his first steps at 20 months. By age two he had few words, showed little interest in toys and rarely made eye contact. “We talked to Liam’s pediatrician and were referred to a specialist,” said Reason. “The next two

years were a whirlwind of evaluations during which autism was mentioned as a possible diagnosis.”

Walker did online research and found Little Bright Lights, a clinic specializing in Applied Behaviour Analysis (ABA) therapy. Simply put, ABA uses positive reinforcement to redirect and teach useful life skills to children with autism. Liam started sessions four times a week with Viki McArthur, a board-certified behaviour analyst.

“Within months of beginning ABA, Liam was playing with toys and would smile ear-to-ear whenever I walked into the room,” said McArthur. “His repertoire of words grew, and he was using them at home to ask for favourite foods, and began pointing at objects and saying ‘car,’ ‘ball’ or ‘Elmo.’” Reason and Walker were encouraged. They were expecting another child, and soon baby Owen was born. The following year, when Liam was four, they received his official diagnosis of autism. “We knew it was coming but it was still tough,” said Reason. “We were flooded with sadness and concern.”

Liam continued making strides with ABA and started kindergarten. “At recess, he

would see kids on the slide and imitate them by climbing the ladder and sliding down – always with a huge grin,” McArthur said. “He would do this over and over until the bell rang.” Reason said he felt grateful for Liam’s inner joy and carefree demeanour.

Then, in April 2019, the couple noticed a change in five-year-old Liam’s gait. He was stumbling around and dragging his left leg. Then he had a seizure. “We rushed him to the Montreal Children’s Hospital, and they kept him for a month,” said Reason. “The seizures continued and baffled doctors who put him through tons of tests and experimented with different medications to get the seizures under control.”

Genetic testing revealed that Liam has mitochondrial disease. Mito Canada defines it as “a group of disorders caused by dysfunctional mitochondria. It can affect multiple energy intensive systems within the body including the liver, kidneys, pancreas, brain and digestive tract. The eyes, inner ear, muscles and blood may also be affected.”

“Imagine trying to run your whole house on one small battery,” said Reason. “Liam’s cells don’t produce enough energy to operate all of his body’s systems.” Later, the diagnosis was further pinpointed as Polg (pronounced pole-gee), which is a rare form of mitochondrial disease affecting balance and cognition. “Seizures are like kryptonite for cognitive development,” Reason said. “Liam had so many and lost all the progress he had made.”

It’s been two years since his diagnosis of Polg and, because of the cocktail of medicine Liam takes every day, he has not had another seizure. He also takes lots of vitamins to keep his muscles strong and eats a diet rich in fats to improve brain function. He still goes for ABA sessions but progress is slow. “Liam doesn’t say complete words anymore and can only point, with assistance,” McArthur said. “He can’t go to school because a bad fall could be devastating.”

The long-term prognosis is not good, but the couple is holding onto hope for a cure and have set up the Liam Foundation with the Montreal Children’s Hospital. The goal is to increase awareness about mitochondrial disease and raise funds for a research team and any equipment that is needed. Recently, Reason and Walker were told about a new medication, to treat Polg, being studied in Europe. They received approval for Liam to be part of a clinical trial, along with five other Quebec kids. The trial will be funded by the Liam Foundation.

Emily Reason, Liam’s sister, is now 22 and studying at Dawson College. “Everything is relative,” she said. “I never thought I would look back, with nostalgia, to the days when my brother just had autism; Polg is so much scarier.” Although he can’t say it in words, Emily feels Liam’s deep affection. “The other day, I was sitting on the couch and he spontaneously came over, snuggled up close to me and fell asleep,” she said. “I just love him so much.”

The Reason family runs like a finely-tuned machine. Walker is full-time mom to Liam and Owen. Reason is the breadwinner, working long hours as co-owner of a truck dealership and is the family spokesperson. Emily takes care of social media for the Liam Foundation and does fundraising – selling soaps, T-shirts, hoodies and coffee mugs that feature Liam’s adorable footprints and the motto “Little Steps but Always Forward.” Even little brother Owen, now four, has a role. Because his big brother takes so many meds, Walker has alarms set as reminders. When he hears it ring, Owen will rush over and say, “Mom, it’s time for Liam’s medicine.” ■

To donate to the Liam Foundation, visit www.fondationduchildren.com/en/fundraising/liam-foundation.



Liam at five years old heading to the St. Patrick’s Day parade in Hudson. Photo courtesy of Kevin Reason

Towns and cities improve accessibility

by *Martin C. Barry*

Every year in Quebec, administrators and elected officials in towns and cities are required to file a report to the government outlining their efforts to make municipal facilities—including swimming pools, recreational equipment and city-owned buildings—friendlier and more accessible to people impacted by a range of disabilities.

The requirement stems from provincial legislation (Bill 56) dating back to 1978, setting down ground rules that are now overseen by the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec. The 43-year-old law established the basic terms and conditions that determine accessibility standards in public areas and buildings, as well as services that should be adapted for the disabled.



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While the law has been updated several times since the 1970s, since 2005 Quebec municipalities of more than 15,000 residents must comply with the province and prepare an annual action plan to improve the social, professional and educational integration of persons with disabilities.

Inspirations recently took stock of the compliance requirement as it is being met by three Montreal-area municipalities: The city of Westmount, the city of Côte Saint-Luc (CSL) and the Town of Mount Royal.

Westmount



The playground equipment in Stayner Park was replaced in Fall 2019. This is an example of an ADA-standard adapted swing. Photo: City of Westmount

Westmount dedicates an entire section of its website to the accessibility issue, with links to the city's "2020 Action Plan Concerning Persons with Disabilities," as well as to an exhaustive guide and directory (dating from late 2019) to all buildings in Westmount that are accessible. The Westmount Accessibility Advisory Committee was created in September 2020, and its mandate will run until July 2021.

The guide provides a comprehensive inventory of all the commercial establishments (including restaurants, bank branches, pharmacies), churches and other types of establishments in Westmount where there is wheelchair access.

In addition, the 2020 action plan identifies many other efforts the city has taken or intends to take towards facilitating persons with various types of disabilities.

The measures range from the creation of a sensory storytime program for children with autism at the public library, to the implementation of a vulnerable persons registry to be used by Public Safety officers, and the installation of adapted play equipment in parks.

Côte Saint-Luc



The new adult change table and lift at the indoor pool at the Côte Saint-Luc Aquatic and Community Centre. Photo: City of Côte Saint-Luc

CSL's "Action Plan for the Disabled Community," dating from March 2020, notes that there were many achievements in both 2018 and 2019, as well as others to be completed in 2020. CSL says modifications to its outdoor pool in 2019 were a major step in the direction of a fully-accessible outdoor recreation area in the city. They also installed a change table and a patient lift to the indoor pool at the Aquatic and Community Centre (ACC) just before the pandemic.

As part of CSL's overall accessibility plan, all public infrastructures are assessed, with emphasis on mobility within buildings, the availability of universally-accessible washrooms, as well as adapted access and signage. A glance at a chart in CSL's 2020 action plan, listing wheelchair accessibility at buildings owned by CSL, indicates that most locations are wheelchair-accessible, with exceptions being the public works department building and the emergency medical services department.

For the visually-impaired, CSL has implemented some Braille markings and is working on having them throughout the ACC. The creation of an accessibility committee was still considered to be an

"ongoing" project, according to CSL's 2020 action plan.

Town of Mount Royal

In TMR, the town's 2017-2018 disabled persons' action plan (the most recent data available on the web, and in French only) notes that the town's largest and most-used municipal buildings (including the town hall, recreation centre, arena, pool and library) are all wheelchair-accessible.

At TMR's municipal library, administrators have stocked up on large-character books for sight-impaired persons. Books and other materials can also be ordered and delivered to the homes of those with reduced mobility.

But while a park chalet at the town's Mohawk Park has an access ramp, the lack of wheelchair accessibility at the Mount Royal Country Club chalet in Connaught Park (the town's most central green space) remains an ongoing issue.

However, hope is on the horizon for town residents with disabilities: They should be able to easily access the new Sports and Community Centre TMR plans to start construction on soon, with completion scheduled for late 2023.



The TMR recreation centre is one of several municipal buildings where a wheelchair ramp has been installed.

"The new Sports and Community Centre will be 100 per cent accessible in all areas," said town councillor Erin Kennedy, whose council responsibilities include filing the town's annual accessibility report. "There will also be provision for particular areas, specific accessories and equipment for those with reduced mobility," she added. "Generally speaking, those with reduced mobility should find no restrictions." ■

Reset, redesign are key to accessible museums

by *Randy Pinsky*

Many museums have used the lockdown as an opportunity to re-evaluate the visitor experience.

Montreal-based design and production firm GSM Project hosted its third “Cocktails and Creatives” panel on July 23, which explored shifting the discussion from “How can museums be made more accessible?” to “Why aren’t they?”

First off is a need “to reset and redesign how we think,” suggested GSM creative director, Erika Kiessner.

As explained by designer Corey Timpson, “[Museum curators] have a design intent and the visitors have a user intent...When those intents don’t line up, a barrier is created.” By envisioning the needs and interests of patrons of all abilities, problems can often be mitigated, and the visitor experience, enhanced.

If considered at the conception level, accessibility measures for making

museums open to all have the greatest chance of success. When they are tacked on as afterthoughts, however, resentment and strained finances can ensue. “If we keep working backwards,” said Timpson, “how can we ensure greater and deeper engagement?”

At a consultation with the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, Timpson challenged the team to redirect their thinking from why something should be accessible to what could be done if it was not. It is an issue of positioning and working towards a “culture of assuming accessibility at the baseline,” observed Kiessner. Patrons may not remember specific details of exhibits - but they will remember how they felt in them.

There are numerous multi-sensory approaches that could be subtly incorporated into the design and, by default, render exhibits accessible. For instance, audio descriptors can be triggered by sensors as

opposed to pushing buttons for those with dexterity challenges or those who are wary about touch. Varying floor surfaces from linoleum to carpet can also be used instead of visual direction to different exhibits, melding the tactile with acoustics. New York’s Corning Museum of Glass, for example, directs patrons to turn at the sound of the marble-making machine.

As museums carefully re-open (“This is just a small blip in the overall timeline,” commented panelist Sina Barham), the pandemic has demonstrated that many things are possible if they are adapted and thought through. “You want to build empathy instead of sympathy when it comes to the

design process,” Barham explained. “Design from a place of understanding, cooperation, co-creation and collaboration, not of projected fears – that’s really the fundamental difference.” ■



Visitors watch a 360-degree film in a circular theatre at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights, a national museum located in Winnipeg. Photo: CMHR, Ian McCausland

Sesame Street pioneer in breaking down barriers, Yaldei learns

by *Randy Pinsky*



Jason Kingsley discusses the letter ‘D’ with Cookie Monster on *Sesame Street* in 1978. Photo source: YouTube

Sesame Street introduced, in 2015, a new neighbourhood friend, Julia, who is autistic. *Arthur* has kids who stutter and have special needs. And *Team Supreme* features disabled superheroes who tackle bad guys. Have children’s shows always included such representations of difference?

Emily Kingsley, former script writer for *Sesame Street* and the mother of a son with Down syndrome (DS), played an instrumental role in initiating this movement. She shared her story with the Yaldei Developmental Centre on November 17 as part of their webinar speaker series.

Forty-six years ago, Kingsley’s obstetrician told her that her baby “would be severely retarded and unable to do anything.” In spite of such dire predictions, the family decided to try the (then new) approach of early intervention. With assistance from the Mental Retardation Institute, Jason slowly gained skills and independence.

In struggling to find social activities for her son, Kingsley realized that a lot of the barriers to inclusion stemmed from a lack

of awareness. Could including more individuals with differences on the show be the spark needed to implement change?

And so came about the “D is for Dog” episode in 1978, where Jason cheerfully chatted with Cookie Monster - a revolution in television. He would go on to be featured in over 50 “Muppet & Kid” shows. The response was overwhelming. Kingsley recalls how many were astounded at how bright he was, and families living with DS shared, “We’ve never seen kids who look like ours on air.”

The Muppet Fandom site says: “Over the years, *Sesame Street*... [has] incorporated a variety of ‘differently-abled’ characters (and celebrity guests) as role models and to show that physical differences are less important than shared feelings and friendships.” Everyone remembers Linda the Librarian teaching Ernie and Bert sign language, and individuals with visible differences soon became regular fixtures on the set.

Other shows have followed suit. Since debuting in 1996, the children’s animation

program *Arthur*, has explored and normalized difference in relatable ways. From George the Moose struggling to read, to discussions about stuttering and Binky’s panic attacks, the show also covers social issues such as Buster’s single mom and Arthur’s insecurity about getting glasses.

Including diversity in children’s programming has also been beneficial in the long-term, according to researchers at Georgetown University. In surveying over 2,000 families, they found that the introduction of Julia helped autistic families feel more comfortable in public as there was more acceptance and awareness. A team at Texas Tech University has moreover observed that *Daniel Tiger’s Neighbourhood* shows have assisted children with autism better deal with social-emotional challenges such as trying new foods and varying routines.

Kingsley ended the talk with a heartfelt song she wrote with Jason called “Count Me In.” “Doesn’t matter where you come from/ Doesn’t matter where you’ve been/ Everybody is important/ So Count Me In.” ■

CAHD celebrates 25 years at Concordia

by *Jordan Stoopler*

“You can see changes in their self-confidence, their ability to express themselves and socialize.”
– Lenore Vosberg



Ray-Man Aric Ciminera performs in the Centre for the Arts in Human Development's 2010 musical ecodrama *The Frog & the Princess*.
Photo: James Ciminera

On their very first day, the new participants at Concordia's Centre for the Arts in Human Development (CAHD) are often asked how they are feeling. Many are shy and reserved, perhaps unsure of themselves. But, upon their graduation from the program three years later, many have undergone a major personal transformation.

“You can see changes in their self-confidence, their ability to express themselves and socialize,” said Lenore Vosberg, who is co-founder of the Centre along with Concordia professors Stephen Snow and Miranda D'Amico. “Those observations are corroborated by family members who feel that we have made a difference in their lives.”

The CAHD, located on Concordia's Loyola campus in NDG, bills itself as an “educational, clinical and research centre,” offering creative arts therapies in art, drama, music and dance/movement to those with developmental and intellectual disabili-

ties. It caters to those over the age of 21 and offers its therapeutic services through a partnership with the West Montreal Readaptation Centre (CIUSSS-ODIM) and CRDI-TED Miriam (CIUSSS-Centre-Ouest). Participants, who number 20 each two-year session, are all interested in the arts, and meet twice a week in accordance with Concordia University's academic calendar.

Since its inception in 1996, the Centre has trained hundreds of graduate student interns, who have, in turn, provided therapeutic programs to over 300 of the program's participants with special needs.

One of the staples of the program is its biennial original musical show. Thirteen productions have been staged in the Centre's history, with themes ranging from self-confidence, relationships and mental health.

“The shows have had an impact on members of the community,” said Vosberg.

“They all result in people having new knowledge about those with disabilities and what they can achieve artistically.”

This year, the CAHD had to adapt its programming in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. All therapies and sessions have been conducted virtually to ensure the safety of all participants, staff and interns.

The pandemic has also required some creativity when it comes to the upcoming celebrations surrounding the Centre's 25th silver jubilee anniversary. A virtual fundraising event is set for June 17 featuring special tributes and entertainment from participants in the program. An online reception will precede a video presentation highlighting CAHD's achievements.

“25 years is a big achievement,” said Vosberg. “We are happy to still be a Centre providing important services at Concordia.” ■

For information, visit concordia.ca/cahd, CAHD's Facebook page or email cahd@concordia.ca.

Summit School students to get 'Royal' treatment at golf tournament

by *Jordan Stoopler*

After a year away from the links due to the coronavirus pandemic, Summit School's Golf Tournament is set to return for the ninth time this fall, with some exciting changes in store. For one, the tournament will be held at the prestigious Royal Montreal Golf Club in Île Bizard, the future site of the Presidents Cup professional golf competition.

“The golfers are excited that it's going to be at the Royal,” said Stu Guttman, Summit School's director of Development & Major Gifts.

“There's a lot of goodwill and people are excited to get out again,” added Robert Collette, one of the event chairs and parent of a Summit graduate. “Golf is one of the only activities that you can actually do in a safe way, with COVID protocols in place.”

The tournament, typically held in late May to launch the golf season, will shift to an end-of-season affair on October 6.

The move will work to Summit's benefit, most notably in allowing even more student involvement.

“It's more than just a nice day on the greens,” said Herman Erdogmus, director general of Summit School. “It's about making a difference, showcasing what our students are capable of doing while building connections within our community.”

Each golfer will receive a unique token of appreciation. Over 250 leather golf ball holders will be made by Summit's Transitional Education and Career Center students (TECC is a semi-vocational work training program that offers on-site learning opportunities for students aged 16 to 21). Made in TECC's leather work studio, the golf ball holders will feature the Summit logo and can easily be fastened to the golfer's belt.

“The beautiful leather-bound pieces are something they can keep in their golf bags

and serve as a great conversation-starter on the greens,” said Josh Cunningham, vice principal at TECC Campus. “It's a true testament to the students who want to say thank you to the golfers for doing what they can to 'Awaken their Potential.'”

Summit students aged four to 21 will also be joining in on the fun. They will participate in a “game-on” clinic with golf professionals at Royal's putting greens throughout the day.

“At the end of the day, the winners are the students,” said Erdogmus.



Summit TECC students will be hand-crafting 250 leather golf ball holders for the tournament. From left: Josh Cunningham, Shaabose Bailey, Jeremy Reid and Alessio Igloo.
Photo: Summit School Media Program

Proceeds from the tournament will benefit Summit's expansion project of its main campus in Saint-Laurent. ■

For information, visit www.summitgolf.ca.

Giant Steps celebrates 40 years

by *Wendy Singer*

Founded in 1980 by Darlene Berringer, Giant Steps School is a private school recognized and subsidized in the public interest by the Ministry of Education that welcomes students aged four to 21 with autism. On the occasion of the school's 40th anniversary, *Inspirations* spoke with Thomas Henderson, director general since 2014, to discuss the school's accomplishments, challenges and exciting plans for the future.

What is Giant Steps' greatest achievement?

Keeping the spirit in which Giant Steps was founded alive. That's a spirit of innovation and keeping ourselves at the forefront of autism services. We were one of the first autism-specific schools in the world, and our model was replicated in other cities. What we did in the beginning years by implementing a model that is fundamentally founded on inclusion - before inclusion was even a common term - was revolutionary.

What is the biggest challenge the autism community faces?

Access to appropriate supports and services. These include wait times and having varied services that really respond to the needs of the community, at any age. No one group or organization can achieve this alone. We've managed by establishing key partnerships and are always looking to collaborate with others.

During the pandemic, running a school for special needs students where some can't necessarily apply the health and safety protocols like wearing masks has come with its challenges. Our staff and families have risen to the challenge. It has not been easy. Also, the pandemic has made it impossible to implement our inclusion model where students attend their local school.

Has the perception of autism changed over the years?

Completely! Awareness has gone up 1,000 percent. In the 1980s when I started

working in the field, autism was very rarely diagnosed and poorly understood. Now it would be hard to find someone that doesn't have a fairly good understanding of what it is. We went from a very deficit-based model of autism - that is in some ways still there - to a strength-based approach, focusing on neurodiversity and an individual's strengths.

What has Giant Steps' role been in transforming perceptions?

We've always tried to be a model for thinking outside of the box, being innovative and really student-centred. For us, it's all about the needs of our students, their families and communities. If the focus is on the actual people then you're able to provide services that make sense.

Has your student profile changed?

Yes. We're a school that is complimentary with the public school system, so we receive the students who can't necessarily be successful in their regular school setting. As the school boards develop more and more services, they refer different types of kids as well. There's been a shift over time as more community services become available. We're there to complement those systems.

Tell us about your plans for the new Giant Steps Autism Centre.

When I became director general, it was pretty obvious to me that we needed to consider changing locations. After not finding an ideal location, we went deep into a process with community stakeholders, and asked, "If money was no limit, if we could build the dream, what would it look like?" We realized there was a need for something much bigger. It was a go-big-or-go-home situation, and we decided to go big!

What will it feature?

It is a state-of-the-art centre based on four pillars: Education (preschool, elementary and secondary); Adult Education and Training Centre (employment training); Resource and Community Centre; and Research and Innovation Centre, which will include a living lab that will be a hub for school-based autism research. Student capacity will rise from 90 to 120, and we will add five inclusive classrooms that can accommodate another 50 students, autistic



Thomas Henderson spending time in the Giant Steps schoolyard with a student on April 20.
Photo: Paul Karwatsky

and non-autistic. Adult education capacity will increase from 12 to 50 students, with many more served through employment support programs.

It's an ambitious project, located in the Technopole Angus neighbourhood. We're all extremely excited about it and believe in its importance. We can see by the com-

munity's response that they think so too. We are partway through our fundraising campaign and hope to start construction as soon as possible and open in 2023. ■

Read more about the Giant Steps Autism Centre at www.giantstepsautismcentre.com.

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Brandon Riddoch receives *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award

by *Valentina Basilicata*

Artist Brandon Riddoch, the first recipient of the *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award, admitted he was shocked and surprised to learn he'd been bestowed such an honour. "I've never won anything before in my life!" said the 24-year-old.

Earlier this year, *Inspirations* launched a contest sponsored by Montrealer Henry Zavriyev - a 27-year-old real-estate entrepreneur - seeking to highlight the exceptional work of an individual with special needs. (See story, p. 15)

"I would say thanks to [Henry] for all this. It's very touching," Riddoch said, adding it's nice to be recognized by someone his own age for all the hard work he's been doing.

Riddoch runs a small art business called Enchanted Trades. He uses "good old-fashioned paint" to create custom decorative gift bags for the Light a Dream Boutique and the Bramble House store, both located in the Valois Village in Pointe-Claire.

Cindy Finn, director general of the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB), nominated Riddoch for the award. In her submission, Finn explains that as a student of LBPSB's co-operative education program from 2015 to 2018, Riddoch "served as a mentor to the other students in the program, sharing his visual arts techniques and ideas. Although Brandon has now completed the educational component of his studies, he continues to volunteer his time at Light a Dream."

Located on Donegani Ave., this quaint gift store employs participants from the board's program, providing young adults with special needs the opportunity to experience a work environment while developing life and social skills.

Riddoch's creations have also been on display at several local art and craft fairs, including the Creatability Expo held at Peter Hall School. He sells canvas paintings, bookmarks and ornaments featuring his vibrant and detailed artwork. Since the COVID-19 pandemic hit last year, Brandon has transitioned to working from home

rather than at the Light a Dream Boutique. He has his own art studio—a converted bedroom—where he can spend entire days drawing and painting while listening to his favourite music. His mother, Jodie Lennon, also takes orders through her Facebook page. Riddoch has designed bookmarks for his mother's students, which she included in their Christmas care packages, and he has even given her pupils an online art lesson during the pandemic.

"You give him a pencil and he can start drawing, drawing, drawing," said his mom.

His interest in art began in elementary school. "When I draw, I discover my own kind of magic that I give to this world," he said. And it's quite an elaborate world. Other than recreating Disney and superhero characters in great detail for patrons, Riddoch has developed over 3,000 of his own unique characters, each one with its own backstory. He is working toward developing stories for these personages and hopes to eventually write and illustrate children's books or even animated films.

"My ultimate dream is to work for Disney Studios as a character artist," said Riddoch, who was inspired by his time at Spectrum Productions, a company providing media production opportunities for individuals with autism.

"My favourite thing to create is something that makes somebody smile," Riddoch shared. "I sell my merchandise based on the size of the product. I want to run a good business." Yet making money isn't his main goal.

"When he does make something for someone, he's not looking at his wallet. He's watching their face to see their reaction to whatever he's created for them. That's what really brings him joy," beamed his mother.

Riddoch added, "Some search for riches and glory while others search for different kinds of riches, which is a warm feeling on the inside." ■

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



Inspirations Entrepreneurial Award recipient Brandon Riddoch sharing samples of his artwork at Light A Dream prior to the pandemic.
Photo: Diana Zuleeg

Making art and new friends at Friendship Circle's new Soul Studio

by *Randy Pinsky*

The Friendship Circle has launched a new program that focuses on the arts, the Soul Studio Art Program. Similar to the format of its vocational culinary arts program, DeLaMie (see story in the Fall 2020 / Winter 2021 issue, p. 14), the culinary arts program is designed for young adults 18 years and over experiencing psychological, intellectual, social or physical challenges. As noted on their website, "Through educational programming driven by each artist's creative impulses, participants have the opportunity to express themselves through creative exploration of the arts while also learning a variety of vocational skills."

Thanks to a Nova Grant, participants get to explore various art media and improve their technique with professional art therapists, artists and trained volunteers.

Through classes, museum trips and movies, young adults can expand their skill sets and learn how to exhibit and market their work online.

As with DeLaMie, Soul Studio is aligned with the Quebec Ministry of Education's Social Integration Services Program, developed to encourage each student's optimal functioning, including psychomotor, personal and social skills, as well as verbal and non-verbal communication.

Soul Studio is in partnership with Agence Ometz, the English Montreal School Board, Wagar Adult Education Centre and the Jewish Community Foundation of Montreal. ■

For information, visit www.friendshipcircle.ca/soulstudio.

Henry Zavriyev: A young entrepreneur with a big heart

by *Cindy Davis*

Henry Zavriyev has always had big ideas. From a young age, the real estate developer knew he wanted to do something impactful, and that he wanted to help people – he just didn't know what form that would take.



Henry Zavriyev has teamed up with *Inspirations* to create an entrepreneurial award. Photo courtesy of H. Zavriyev

Zavriyev moved to Montreal in 2012 at the age of 18 to attend Concordia University. While at school—a stint that he admits was short-lived—he took a part-time job as a janitor to make some extra money. On the job, he noticed some outdated apartments in the building and asked the property owner if he could fix them up and rent them out for a fee. One after another, the apartments started renting, and he eventually earned enough money to start buying his own properties. Only nine years later, Zavriyev, now 27, is owner of Leyad, a Montreal-based real estate development firm owning and managing properties across Montreal.

Building his career took most of his time and energy for the first several years, but now Zavriyev says he feels lucky to be at a point in his life, at such a young age, where he can give back.

“I always thought ‘okay, I’m going to get involved in different organizations when

I turn 60 or 70,’” he said. “Then I realized that if I am really the person who I think I am, and if I’m going to stay true to who I am, then I should be doing it now.”

Zavriyev has teamed up with *Inspirations* to create a new entrepreneurial award to highlight individuals within the special needs community who exhibit a strong entrepreneurial spirit. “I realize that there are people out there who are creative and want to do things, but they can’t do it without some kind of support because they are not being included in the same way,” he said. “I’m 100 percent aware of my privilege in every respect, and I want to be able to facilitate their ideas and help make them a reality. Everyone deserves that—they just need a pathway to get it done.”

Zavriyev admits that he doesn’t know much about the challenges facing the special needs community, but he is eager to learn all he can. He has a vivid memory from nursery school of being told by his

teachers not to ask any questions when a young girl with a visible disability joined the class. Being outspoken, Zavriyev did ask her about it anyway and has had the desire to build others up—particularly anyone who felt marginalized—ever since. In middle school, he created his own club that he called the Awesome Secret People. Whenever he saw someone being bullied or excluded, he would give them a hand-made badge to let them know that they were a part of the ASP club and that they were not alone. Later, in boarding school, he was dubbed the “dorm listener,” as he would be willing to lend an ear to anyone who needed someone to talk to.

Now, he is excited to channel that energy into creating opportunities through this award. “I’m sure there are tons of people with all kinds of ideas to offer,” said Zavriyev. “We just have to figure out how to get them involved. It’s super, super important. If I can introduce some luck into the equation, that would be amazing.” ■

JEM Workshop, Promo 21 team up, create work opportunities

by *Cindy Davis*



JEM Worker Daniel Dubuc proudly shows off his new T-shirt printed by Promo 21. Photo: Promo 21

Earlier this winter, JEM Workshop, an adapted enterprise that provides packaging and fulfillment services, created branded T-shirts for their more than 75 workers as a token of appreciation for their hard work. The gesture was part of a larger Winter Wellness Program, where the workers were treated to weekly surprises – from video messages from past volunteers to sweet treats – to provide a sense of positivity and motivation during the cold winter months. The program was supported by Federation CJA’s Mental Health and Isolation Reduction Grant.

When it came time to decide where to print their T-shirts, JEM Workshop knew that Promo 21 would be a perfect fit.

“Hiring Promo 21 was an obvious choice,” said Maia Cooper, executive director of JEM Workshop. “Promo 21 and JEM Workshop share a similar mission, and we both value the employment of individuals with neurodiversity. The collaboration between our two organizations has the potential for tremendous synergies.

This particular project allowed JEM Workshop and Promo 21 to begin working together, supporting one another and creating employment opportunities for this population. The bonus was the end result: the printed T-shirts look great, and our workers were so excited to receive them. Promo 21 did a fantastic job!”

Martin Gould, executive director of Promo 21, was happy to take on the project. The custom printing company employs 35 adults with special needs. “We are all in this together! The fact that it is not easy to get contracts, especially during this time of COVID, adaptive workplaces must band together and encourage one another as much as possible and use their services when needed,” he said. “Neurodiverse adults are just as capable as you and me but may require a little more supervision and at times adaptation to the procedures and routines. Therefore, they should be given the same opportunity to work as much as a neurotypical individual so that they can contribute to the community and increase their self-worth.” ■



Kelly Lalonde Bourret of Promo 21 prints a JEM Workshop T-shirt. Photo: Promo 21

For information, visit www.promo21.org and www.jemworkshop.org.



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Virage virtuel et emploi chez les personnes en situation de handicap

Par *Amélie Tremblay*

La COVID a pris beaucoup de place dans nos vies! Depuis plus d'un an, nous avons dû apprendre de nouvelles façons de faire les choses. Le travail est l'une des sphères qui a le plus changé. Alors qu'auparavant, le télétravail était un avantage social présent dans une minorité d'entreprises, il est aujourd'hui exigé par le gouvernement.

Pour les personnes en situation de handicap, ces changements amènent leur lot d'inconvénients, mais aussi d'avantages.

Moins de déplacements = moins d'obstacles

L'accessibilité est loin d'être universelle au Québec et il n'est pas toujours facile de se déplacer pour une personne en situation de handicap. Rampe d'autobus non fonctionnelle, transport adapté en retard, ascenseur absent sont autant d'irritants qui peuvent faire que se rendre en entrevue devienne un calvaire. Avec les entrevues sur Zoom, plus besoin de se demander si les trottoirs sont déneigés. On s'assure que sa caméra et son micro sont fonctionnels et on est prêt pour son entrevue.

Difficultés techniques

Que ce soit parce qu'on n'est pas habile avec la technologie, parce qu'on vit avec des difficultés cognitives ou que l'on n'a pas les moyens d'acheter du matériel informatique adapté, on se retrouve parfois face à des difficultés techniques qui peuvent rendre plus complexe la recherche d'emploi.

Handicap moins visible

Révéler ou non son handicap est une question qui revient souvent dans nos bureaux.

Or, pour certains, cette question ne se posait pas avant. En effet, il est difficile de passer outre le handicap de quelqu'un qui arrive en fauteuil roulant. L'entrevue par visioconférence permet à certaines personnes de ne pas avoir à parler du handicap en entrevue. Cela réduit ainsi les possibilités d'être discriminé sur cette base ce qui arrive, malheureusement, encore trop souvent.

Isolement

Depuis l'an dernier, nos contacts humains ont été considérablement réduits. Si, par-dessus le marché, on ne travaille pas, on peut rapidement se sentir isolé. Le fait de se retrouver coupé du monde peut amener un sentiment de découragement qui risque de nuire à la recherche d'emploi. Il est important de ne pas se laisser aller aux sentiments négatifs et de s'entourer, même à distance, de personnes qui peuvent nous soutenir et nous motiver. ■

L'équipe de L'ÉTAPE est d'ailleurs toujours là pour vous accompagner dans votre recherche d'emploi que ce soit en personne (avec les mesures sanitaires requises), par visioconférence ou par téléphone. N'hésitez pas à nous appeler au 514 526-0887 pour parler avec un membre de notre équipe!

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La septième édition du Prix À part entière Et les gagnants sont...

Par *Amélie Tremblay*



Samuel Benamron, propriétaire de Physio-Verdun en compagnie de Diego Noya, aide-physio neuro-divers (à gauche); Mathilde Montambault, physiothérapeute en chef (à droite); Ainslie MacDonald, aide-physio neuro-divers et Nicole Charat, mère de Ainslie, (au fond à droite) à Physio-Verdun le 22 décembre. Photo : Courtoisie de Physio-Verdun

Ève-Marie Lortie a coanimé l'événement avec Daniel Jean, directeur général de l'OPHQ. Les sept membres du jury ont sélectionné avec soin les lauréats suivants.

Monique Lefebvre a reçu le prix « Individu » pour son implication au sein d'AlterGo qui soutient l'intégration sociale des personnes handicapées dans leurs activités sportives et culturelles. C'est également madame Lefebvre qui a travaillé à la création du Défi sportif AlterGo, le plus grand événement multisport annuel au Canada.

L'Association des personnes handicapées de Bellechasse s'est vu décerner le prix « Organisme à but non lucratif » grâce

à la mise sur pied de l'initiative « Virage inclusif ». Ce projet fait la promotion de nouvelles pratiques en matière d'intégration et d'accessibilité dans les quatre axes d'influence des municipalités : infrastructures, loisirs, communications aux citoyens ainsi que sensibilisation des employés.

La Ville de Beloeil a reçu le prix « Municipalités, MRC et autres communautés » pour la création d'un centre aquatique entièrement accessible qui brise les frontières entre les personnes handicapées et le reste de la population.

Dans la catégorie « Établissements d'enseignement soutenant la réussite éducative », le **Centre d'éducation des adultes de l'Estuaire** a remporté une bourse pour avoir mis en place un programme novateur d'intégration sociale et socioprofessionnelle auprès de quatre groupes d'environ 40 adultes handicapés.

Auticonsult a remporté le prix « Entreprises soutenant l'intégration et le maintien en emploi des personnes

handicapées » en employant spécifiquement des personnes autistes comme consultants informatiques. L'entreprise crée des environnements professionnels adaptés en confiant au personnel des projets qui lui correspondent.

Les prix « Coup de cœur du jury » ont été remportés par deux entreprises qui aiment faire les choses autrement. **Maï(g)wenn et les Orteils**, une compagnie de danse et de gigue contemporaines, propose des prestations d'artistes handicapés qui ne sont pas intégrés dans une équipe d'artistes danseurs sans incapacité comme c'est habituellement le cas. De son côté, **Physio-Verdun** emploie des personnes handicapées, partage ses expériences sur plusieurs plateformes et diffuse des messages inspirants afin de promouvoir le potentiel des personnes handicapées en milieu de travail. ■

Pour plus de détails sur le Prix À part entière, visitez le site Internet de l'OPHQ www.ophq.gouv.qc.ca/evenements/prix-a-part-entiere/edition-2020.html.

My Dear Diary -

Par *Zeynep Dila Avci*

This is what I did today!

My Dear Diary – This is what I did today! (Cher journal – Voici ce que j'ai fait aujourd'hui!) a été imaginé et écrit par Jennifer Aitken et sa fille Helen Aitken Williams. Ce journal bien spécial permet aux enfants de consigner quotidiennement leurs pensées et émotions, même s'ils ne peuvent pas s'exprimer avec des mots.

Ayant travaillé dans des camps de jour pour enfants aux besoins particuliers, Helen Aitken Williams, coauteure du livre, estime que les livres ou agendas au contenu préformaté sont plus bénéfiques pour le développement de l'enfant comparativement aux carnets vierges ordinaires. Pour sa part, ce journal vise à aider les enfants à communiquer au moyen de questions présélectionnées, de réponses sous forme d'images et d'outils qui laissent libre cours à l'esprit créatif des jeunes pour s'exprimer avec des mots ou des dessins. Le livre s'avère un

outil parfait pour que parent, éducateur ou tuteur puissent suivre les activités quotidiennes de l'enfant et ses apprentissages, tout en favorisant le développement d'une communication plus efficace entre l'adulte et l'enfant. Grâce aux questions formatées toutes simples et aux zones de dessin, ce journal peut également constituer un passe-temps amusant pour l'enfant.

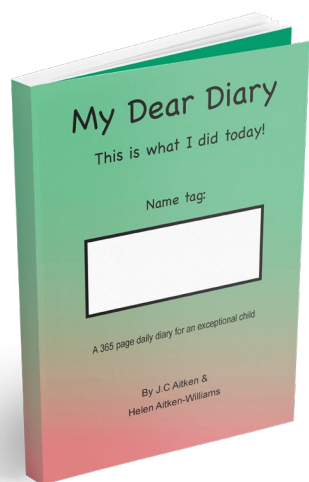
L'auteure est elle-même mère d'un enfant atteint d'un trouble déficitaire de l'attention avec hyperactivité et compte parmi son cercle d'amis des parents d'enfants autistes et quelques-uns atteints de trisomie 21. Forte de sa grande connaissance des troubles du développement, des moyens de prévenir les comportements perturbateurs et des mesures d'apaisement des troubles anxieux, elle souligne qu'il est très important de bien connaître son enfant afin

de pouvoir dresser un portrait réel de ses besoins.

À la lumière de l'expérience de travail de la coauteure et de ses connaissances en matière de psychologie et de thérapie ABA, mère et fille se sont lancées dans la conception de ce journal exceptionnel qui ne s'adresse pas seulement aux enfants ayant des besoins particuliers, mais bien à l'ensemble des jeunes.

Ce que les auteures souhaitent plus que tout, c'est venir en aide aux enfants. Selon elles, si ce journal contribue à aider ne serait-ce qu'un seul enfant dans le monde, le jeu en aura valu la chandelle. ■

Offert en version anglaise seulement, *My Dear Diary – This is what I did today!* est en vente chez Chapters Indigo, Amazon et Barnes & Noble au prix de 24,95 \$.



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Service de conférences sur mesure pour démystifier la trisomie 21

Par *Sarah-Elizabeth Meehan*



Gabriel, Florence, Laurence et Raphaël lors du Salon DI-TSA en janvier 2020.
Photo : Regroupement pour la Trisomie 21

Le Regroupement pour la Trisomie 21 (RT21) offre un service de conférences sur mesure s'adressant aux divers professionnels qui sont en contact avec une clientèle vivant avec la trisomie 21, mais aussi à la population en général qui veut en savoir plus sur cet état.

Nous offrons, entre autres, une présentation interactive sur la trisomie 21 afin de répondre aux questions les plus souvent posées concernant cet état. Nous pouvons d'ailleurs être accompagnés de jeunes adultes vivant avec la trisomie 21 afin qu'ils partagent leur réalité au quotidien.

Nous avons aussi une conférence destinée aux milieux de garde en petite enfance afin de mieux les outiller face à la trisomie 21 et favoriser une inclusion réussie. Nous en profitons pour répondre aux questions spécifiques liées à des situations vécues dans leur milieu.

Il est également possible d'inviter des parents d'enfants ayant une trisomie 21 lors de nos conférences pour témoigner ou partager leur expérience personnelle.

D'ailleurs, chaque année, c'est accompagnés de parents que nous nous déplaçons à l'Université de Montréal pour sensibiliser les futurs médecins à la trisomie 21.

« L'approche collaborative avec les patients-partenaires prend de plus en plus de place au sein de nos programmes pédagogiques à l'Université de Montréal, et vous avez démontré ce matin toute leur importance. Merci, merci, merci! », a déclaré Aspasia Karalis, directrice du programme de résidence en génétique et génomique médicales, Université de Montréal.

Le RT21 est un organisme de bienfaisance montréalais qui soutient les familles touchées par la trisomie 21. Notre mission est de favoriser le plein développement des personnes ayant une trisomie 21, promouvoir leur contribution au sein de la société et défendre leurs droits, en plus de soutenir les familles, les proches aidants et les professionnels qui les entourent. ■

Contactez-nous pour en apprendre plus sur nos services et activités info@trisomie.qc.ca ou consultez notre site www.trisomie.qc.ca.

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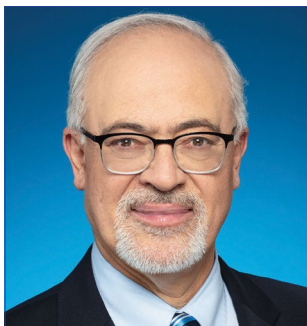


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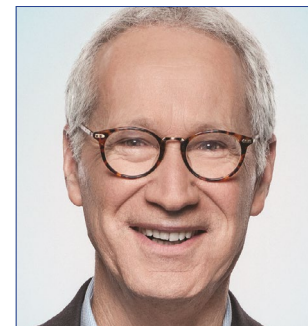
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**ASSEMBLÉE NATIONALE
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Improving access to local businesses 'win-win' for everyone



by
Jennifer Maccarone

In Quebec, more than 2 million people live with a disability. With our aging population, this number will be consistently growing over the next few years. The challenge of accessibility for people with reduced mobility is an ever-present issue that many citizens are unfortunately faced with every day.

Although a lot of work has been done in the last few years to allow better access for people with disabilities to local businesses, there's still work to be done. For example, recommendations had been made on this very subject in 2017 subsequent to a mandate from the Commission on Economy and Labour at the National Assembly.

However, the situation is still an important concern. Even today a person with reduced mobility is denied access to a business due to the physical layout of the building. For example, the obligation to climb two steps to enter a building that doesn't have an access ramp limits the possibility for a person in a wheelchair or with other limitations to gain access. For the citizen, it's a constraint and a hindrance to his or her autonomy. For the business owner, it's a loss of customers, and therefore a loss of revenue.

If access to local businesses is challenging for a person with reduced mobility as a customer, it's equally challenging when it comes to access to employment. With such extreme labour shortages, we do not have the luxury of limiting access to employment due to an issue that could be easily resolved. Providing improved access to local businesses for people with limited mobility is a win-win situation for employers and employees alike.

For the past three years, millions of dollars in support for our local merchants have been lying dormant. Subjected to COVID-19 complications and difficulties, now more than ever we should consider making accessibility one of the levers to revive the economic vitality of our cities and towns. The debate regarding mobility through accessibility must be done with and for disabled people, under the conditions of strong calls to action by our legislators, including the Justice Department.

We cannot deprive ourselves of a motivated, persevering and hard-working workforce. We cannot deprive ourselves from including this important segment of the Quebec population in our planning. We cannot deny them a chance to live and to thrive.

That is why I am currently working on this important mandate in the National Assembly in an effort to advance the cause of our community. I sincerely hope that the

government will accept my proposed initiative mandate with a goal toward building a better world for people with disabilities. ■



Removing barriers to accessibility opens doors to all.

Jennifer Maccarone is the MNA for Westmount-Saint-Louis and the official opposition critic for Diversity and Inclusiveness, LGBTQ2 and Persons Living with a Disability or an Autism Spectrum Disorder.



by
Steven Atme

Ben Bisanti: The making of an animation star

His name is Benjamin Bisanti. I met this creative 24-year-old animator during the time I was making my film *The Power of One*. Ben first messaged me on Facebook in the fall of 2019. He sent his portfolio including works from his YouTube channel, "BBProductions." After watching them, I was thrilled and welcomed him to our production team.

Ben was one of our background performers, improvising in two skits, bringing great energy with him. After our last film session, he was super happy because this man with autism wanted to do something big.

When Ben was younger, he wanted to be a NASCAR driver or chef, until he saw one film that changed his life: *The Land Before Time*. He was also influenced by Disney, Don Bluth, Stephen Hillenber and other favourite themes. Ben said, "I want to be

the great animator of the past, present and future."

What helped him overcome obstacles? Feeling excluded and misunderstood, Ben decided to start his own independent projects. He created a YouTube channel. "I use animation to tell stories and ideas get stuck in my head for a while. Then, I let them come to life," he said.

Ben attends Spectrum Productions (a non-profit enterprise that teaches media and film production, amongst many other life skills, to people with autism), where he continues to learn his craft.

Ben's work process includes writing and designing his stories. Then, cast members record their voices from home, and email their recordings to him. To complete the project, he edits the film with the help of other collaborators.

A proud and determined young man made his dream come true. Trust me, I appear in BBProductions' series, "Dinosaur Realm," and I can assure you that Ben's work is amazing! He wants everyone to know: "Don't let disabilities define who you are. Be that person you want to be. Make the neurotypical people see we're capable of being talented and motivated to create stuff. Don't let dreams be dreams. Make them come true. Just do it." ■

Follow Ben and watch BBProductions videos on YouTube. For voiceover opportunities, email benjaminbisanti@gmail.com.

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. His film *The Power of One* is now available on DVD.

Artistic Heroes Talent Show

Steven Atme is organizing a virtual talent show! People of all ages from across Canada will be performing for the main purpose of spreading joy and laughter, staying connected and sticking together during this pandemic. The show will premiere on June 19. Registration is now open on Eventbrite.



Top row: Benjamin Bisanti and his animated drawing "Astrosatis in Flight." Bottom row: Steven Atme and "Tyrannous," Bisanti's animated drawing from "Dinosaur Realm."



by *Nick Katalifos*

Horizon 21 to share the Polaris experience, and more

Since I wrote about the Polaris Enterprise initiative in the last edition of *Inspirations*, the project has attracted a great deal of attention, both locally and nationally. An industry-based adult education and employment initiative, Polaris was designed to prepare autistic adults for employment through a collaboration including Giant Steps School and Resource and Training Centre, the Wagar Adult Education Centre of the EMSB (which serves as the base for the program), the Transforming Autism Care Consortium (TACC), and corporate partner Loblaw Companies Ltd. (Weston).

A major component of the initiative is the development and organization of a virtual conference, “Horizon 21.” Scheduled for June 11 and 12, 2021, the main focus is to share the results of the Polaris Enterprise’s first year of operations. Various stakeholders, including Polaris program participants, will share their lived experiences and best practices in preparation for the next cohort starting in August at Wagar.

Horizon 21 will also include world-renown keynote speakers Randy Lewis (retired executive, Walgreens and autism advocate) and Wanda Deschamps (autistic Canadian, advocate and “inclusion revolutionist”).

In addition, panel sessions will feature thought leaders from Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and France. The panels will explore the current state of Autism-at-Work/Neurodiversity-at-Work employment initiatives. Furthermore, they will feature the latest research focused upon empowering employers to build inclusive teams and equipping autistic adults with the necessary strategies to find and maintain employment. Autistic perspectives will be a main area of focus, and current pathways to employment will be highlighted.

One of the conference’s better known panelists is also its youngest—Siena Castellon. A neurodiversity advocate, author, mentor and United Nations Young Leader for Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Castellon is the founder of Neurodiversity Celebration Week, an international campaign that aims to change the negative stereotypes about autism. The campaign focuses upon learning differences and encourages schools to concentrate on the strengths and talents of neurodivergent students. More than 1,400 schools and over 800,000 students from around the world have participated in the campaign.

The virtual conference exhibit hall will feature organizations and employment programs seeking to recruit autistic individuals, service providers and several educational institutions offering various pathways to employment. Also featured will be Giant Steps’ seven-part video series “Navigate the New Normal,” a collection of video interviews during COVID-19



Polaris Enterprise program participants at the Provigo Distribution Centre in Laval. Photo: Andre Pereira

with people who are on the autism spectrum.

Ultimately, the Polaris Enterprise’s virtual conference will offer an excellent variety of information and opportunities to those interested in employment for autistic individuals. ■

For information, visit horizon21.vfairs.com.

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 *Joanne Charron*

C.A.R.E. is a godsend to families, mine included

As president of the board of directors of the Centre d’activités récréatives et éducatives (C.A.R.E.) and as a mother of an adult son who attends the centre, I have much to say about the organization.

For those of you who are not aware of C.A.R.E., it is the only program of its kind for the English sector that provides recreational and educational activities for adults 21 years and older with severe physical disabilities.

C.A.R.E. was born in 1986 out of the need for children who had graduated from the Mackay Centre School and had no available options for further education or integration. At the time, parents were told their children would have to remain at home or be institutionalized as there was nowhere for English-speaking young adults with severe physical disabilities to go in Montreal.

So parents got together to form a continuing education program along with the help of the English Montreal School Board, and

this has evolved into the C.A.R.E. Centre we know today. The organization was incorporated in 1995 and is now housed in the Wagar Adult Education Centre building.

Without this program, a couple would have to decide which one of them would have to quit their job to stay home with their adult child. If you were a single parent, you would have to quit your job and go on welfare. If this wasn’t an option, you would have to institutionalize your child, and presently the waiting list is 13 years.

This program is a godsend to families and enhances the lives of adults with severe physical disabilities through supporting their communication, education, spiritual and physical well-being, social inclusion, and provides respite for caregivers.

Because we are the only program of its kind, C.A.R.E. has become in demand and sadly has a growing waiting list. Because C.A.R.E. is a not-for-profit organization and therefore requires funding and government assistance, we are constantly looking for new funding, patrons and increased government support to grow in order to provide services to those on our waiting list and to those who are aging out of the education system with nowhere to go.

Please take the time to check out our website to see who we are and what we do, and become a friend of C.A.R.E. ■

For information, visit www.carecentre.org.

Joanne Charron is the president of the board of directors of C.A.R.E. Centre and is special advisor to *Inspirations*.



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by *Wendy Singer*

While the pandemic has certainly transformed the way our community works, it has not changed its spirit and heart. This school year, we have been touched by the generosity of our readers and supporters, and said goodbye to a friend.

A tribute in honour of Joel Yanofsky

It is with deep sadness that we share the passing of **Joel Yanofsky**, author of *Bad Animals: A Father's Accidental Education in Autism*, and *The Now What? Parents' Guide to Autism*, amongst other literary works. Yanofsky was a beloved member of Montreal's autism, special needs and literary communities, husband of **Cynthia Davis** and Dad to **Jonah Davis Yanofsky**. He was a friend to *Inspirations*. He died of cancer on December 23 at the age of 65.

On February 27, the Quebec Writers Federation hosted "Joel and Me: An Appreciation of a Kind" – A Literary Tribute. Colleagues and family shared heartfelt stories about their connections with Yanofsky, all weaving a common thread; he touched many hearts and lives. His legacy will live on through the bodies of work he wrote, and the passion, kindness and consideration he shared guiding other writers and supporting organizations like the Friendship Circle.

As a tribute, the family is developing "The Joel Yanofsky Library and Resource Centre of the Friendship Circle." This multifaceted Centre will include a lending library comprised of Yanofsky's extensive collection of books about autism, special needs and family journeys, a selection supporting person-centred inclusion and circles of care chosen by Davis, children's books selected by Jonah, and more.

The Centre will be built up over time. "Joel wanted to give something back to the special needs community, something that would be a living tribute involving a wealth of resources and the active participation of individuals with special needs," said Davis. "Joel helped so many people in so many ways. There's been an outpouring of love. The more donations that come in, the more we can do with the project."

Donate through
www.friendshipcircle.ca.

Once there, direct your donation to the
Joel Yanofsky Library and Resource
Centre.



Cynthia Davis, Jonah Davis Yanofsky and Joel Yanofsky with their dogs Lexi and Phoebe at Jonah's graduation from Summit School in the summer of 2020. Photo courtesy of Cynthia Davis



Zach Reisman sharing his greeting cards.
Photo: Lorri Benedik

Zach Designs raises funds, awareness for *Inspirations*

Zach Reisman is president and illustrator of holiday and greeting card enterprise, Zach Designs. Last fall, Reisman pledged to donate a portion of the proceeds of his holiday season card sales to *Inspirations*. We were touched by his gesture, and blown away by the most generous gift of \$500 that arrived over the winter.

Reisman impressed us not only with his attractive illustrations, but with his commitment to raising funds. He and his mother and business partner **Lorri Benedik** hand-deliver many of their orders, and saw this as an opportunity to spread awareness about their fundraising efforts. In the process, they witnessed just how generous and supportive their clients are. Reisman has already committed to raising funds for the Liam Foundation (see p. 9) next holiday season.

Reisman explained how important giving back is to him. He has been fundraising since he was a little boy, having donated to the Morgan Arboretum on his seventh birthday, and collected \$150 for Rosie Animal Adoption in lieu of gifts for his 13th birthday. "It is important to me to support causes that are close to my heart, and to spread awareness about autism and special needs and the great work that is being done in our community," said Reisman.

Thank you, [Zach Designs!](#)

M. Williams opens new doors to *Inspirations*

Kristopher Mancini and **Brandon Williams** run M. Williams Enterprise Inc., a social media marketing initiative that aims to help businesses drive more traffic to their online platforms. Mancini has a soft spot for *Inspirations* and wanted to give back. They approached us in the fall with an exciting offer: to conduct a social media marketing campaign to drive more traffic to the *Inspirations* website. This was great timing. We'd just launched our new website, that, amongst other things, features shareable articles and our easy-access database of special needs resources. We spent the next few months collaborating with Mancini and Williams. Reaping the benefits of their hard and meticulous work, we began to see impressive results, with new readers reaching out and helping more individuals connect with services and the special needs community.

Thank you, [M. Williams](#), for your generosity, concern for the special needs community, and support of our work! ■

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Parents.Quebec: New online tool supports parents in search of resources

by Wendy Singer

The English Parents' Committee Association of Quebec (EPCA) and the Fédération des comités de parents du Québec (FCPQ) have launched Parents.Quebec: a singular juncture of parent resources.



Parents.Quebec

Parents.Quebec is a complement to the Open School (École Ouverte) government platform launched last spring. Beyond its pedagogical value, this new tool helps parents find the right resources, depending on the needs, region and age of the child.

"This very relevant and helpful tool will fill a void that has long been a source of frustration for parents who often do not know where to turn when they want to support their children," said Katherine Korakakis, EPCA president.

Whether parents are looking for resources to support their child with special needs or find resources related to literacy, guidance counseling, human rights or mental health (just to name only a few), they can find them easily on this site.

The *Inspirations* team is proud to be a part of this initiative, with *Inspirations* featured as the portal to special needs for the Anglophone community.

The EMSB Database of Special Needs Resources, hosted on the *Inspirations* website, shares over 500 resources in the Greater Montreal and surrounding areas. Korakakis often consults this database. "As a special needs parent, life is already so overwhelming. *Inspirations* helps me find information I need, when I need it. It helps take a little of the load," she said.

For several years, EPCA and FCPQ have sought to boost support for parents by uniting the resources available to them. The support of the Quebec government for this initiative brings this shared vision to life. "While Parents.Quebec is being launched during the pandemic, it is the result of many years of hard work, developed partnerships and repeated requests from parents. The daily lives of families have been turned upside down since last March, and the situation shows more than ever the importance of having a tool that answers parents' questions and helps them find resources

according to their needs," said Kevin Roy, president of the FCPQ in a press release.

"Each day, Quebec parents play a key role in the development and success of their children, and the support of the Quebec government to Parents.Quebec demonstrates the importance and recognition we give them. Since the beginning of the pandemic, parents have demonstrated incredible strength and resilience by juggling school and work at home, and their requests for help have been heard. This tool will become a valuable reference to answer their questions. Like Open School, Parents.Quebec is added to the list of resources and concrete means available to promote student success," said Quebec Education Minister, Jean-François Roberge in a press release. ■

For information, visit www.parents.quebec.

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Cyber K.I.D.S meets online weekly for fun, educational activities

by Wendy Singer



Christopher Simeone having fun animating Cyber K.I.D.S. Photo: Hana MacDougall

In response to the pandemic, the Montreal Center for Learning Disabilities' (MCLD) Aqua K.I.D.S program has morphed into Cyber K.I.D.S, an online socialization and skill building program for children aged six to 16 with special needs. Coordinated by Hana MacDougall and Christopher Simeone, this program replaces the weekly

Aqua K.I.D.S swimming program until pools are once again open. "The MCLD wanted to make sure that no child was left behind during this unprecedented period of time," said Simeone. The program gives kids an opportunity to look forward to their Friday nights with their new friends."

The program runs three times a year and consists of 10 sessions, held on Friday nights. There is a maximum of 20 participants per session. Each meeting includes movement, fun games and exploration of different subjects. ■

For information and to register, visit www.ldmontreal.ca/cyber-kids-program

Hear Entendre Québec removing barriers one clear mask at a time

by *Heidy Wager*



Vanessa Séfriu wearing an M Smiley mask in the parking lot of Hear Entendre Québec in February. Photo: Tahsin Mohammad

Hear Entendre Québec has made it a priority to improve accessibility throughout all communities. This has been even more crucial during the pandemic, with all of the safety protocols in place. Yet, these same protocols also create more barriers for those of us with hearing loss.

We have been distributing ClearMasks, which are transparent around the mouth area, and Face Shields since June 2020 in order to help tear down some of the barriers by allowing the mask wearer's mouth to be visible. Now we are excited to provide two new types of clear face masks that will allow those who are hard of hearing/deaf to speechread and feel included in their own communities.

With so many varieties of masks on the market, we made it a priority to test as many designs as we could to offer what we thought was the best value and price, with

accessibility as our top priority. Based on our research, we are happy to recommend two more products to our members and the general public.

M Smiley is a reusable mask that is washable, comfortable and doesn't fog. It comes in adult and child sizes. These masks can facilitate conversations with children and an older family member or a young friend who has hearing loss.

Our son is hard-of-hearing and we don't realize how much he actually looks at our mouths and reads our lips while talking to him. Cloth face masks muffle our words and make it difficult to hear. Not only will the face shields provide protection, but they will allow for better sound transmission and he can still read our lips! Thank you!!!"

– Rina Hampartsoumian

Humask Pro Vision, made in Quebec, is a new disposable mask, with a transparent

window. It is the first to pass the required ASTM F2100 certification. According to Health Canada, this is the highest quality standard used in healthcare settings (in accordance to the CNESST). Its unique design has been created to provide space between the mouth and the transparent window for comfort and optimal breathability. Made from hypoallergenic and microporous membranes, this mask is distinguished by its anti-fog and anti-reflective properties. ■

To request your accessible masks, visit the Safe & Clear section of our website hearhear.org/face-mask-shield and complete the request form.

For information, email mask@hearhear.org or call (514) 488-5552 ext 4500.

Heidy Wager is the executive director of Hear Entendre Québec.

JDAIM 2021 was an online success

by *Cindy Davis*

February marked Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance & Inclusion Month (JDAIM) in the U.S.A and Canada. Since 2009, it has been designated as a month to foster and promote inclusion of individuals living with disabilities and their families, in Jewish life. Though this year's JDAIM looked a little different because of the pandemic, there were still plenty of interesting online offerings.

The keynote event was held on February 16, when moderator and radio personality Adam Greenberg hosted a panel discussion following the screening of the short film *Sock Guys*. This film is about father-son duo Mark and John Lee Cronin of *John's Crazy Socks* who together started a sock business to ensure that John, who has Down syndrome, and others with disabilities, could find meaningful employment after

graduation. The event, a collaboration between several organizations from Montreal and Toronto, featured guests from both cities with the goal of fostering awareness and providing information on disability-focused social enterprises in our local communities.

Other events included a conversation with a former Israeli soldier disabled in combat who went on to become an accomplished Paralympian, a hilarious interview with comedian and activist Maysoon Zayid, and an enlightening talk about moving from awareness to inclusion with disability activist Sherry Diamond.

See our full story here: www.inspirationsnews.com/inspirations/articles/jdaim-2021-unites-and-empowers-the-community



The short film, *Sock Guys*, was screened as part of this year's JDAIM lineup. Photo: Sock Guys

Cooper 'likes it loud,' curious about new things as he thrives at PEL

by *Kristin McNeill*

Cooper, five, attends Philip E. Layton School. He has FOXG1, an extremely rare neurodevelopmental disorder that impacts brain development and function.

"In Montreal, there are only five of us," said his mother Jennifer Ciambella, referring to the small number of families affected by FOXG1. And they found each other through a private Facebook page for parents, FOXG1 Syndrome Parent Support Group. It's a place where you can ask questions and help each other out, and doctors even learn things there, she said.

There are approximately 760 people diagnosed worldwide with FOXG1, according to Jennifer Leonard, president and director of Family Advocacy International FOXG1 Foundation.

The family discovered Cooper had the syndrome when he was five months old during a routine checkup by a CLSC nurse. She noticed he "wasn't crying properly" and sent them to the emergency room. After weeks of intensive testing, including genetic, and treatment, the senior pediatrician's suspicion that Cooper had FOXG1 syndrome was confirmed.

When he was two years old, his parents opted to feed their son using a gastrostomy tube. He stayed home until it was time to go to school. With a vision impairment called cortical visual impairment (CVI), Cooper was eligible to attend Philip E. Layton School, where he's been going since he was four.

"There are all different types of foxes," explained Ciambella, of the wide spectrum of abilities presented by FOXG1. Cooper doesn't walk, talk or sit up on his own. He can roll over. And how does he communicate? "With me, I just know," she said. "I know by the sounds he makes.

A mother's instinct." He recognizes voices and smiles when he hears his favourites. "When he hears my father on the speakerphone, he starts going crazy!"

Cooper's teachers, Jennifer McLeod and Kimberley Young, both said they learned about FOXG1 for the first time when Cooper joined their classrooms. Along with his four classmates, he can engage in storytime and music, as well as be upright using a standing frame, fully supported and freely able to move his head, arms and legs. In a normal year, students would be using the pool, but for now there's "swimming on the mat!" said Young.

He has one-on-one sessions with speech, music, occupational and physio therapists. "They do it all there. I am very lucky to have them," said Ciambella.

Because Cooper is non-verbal and his movements can sometimes be involuntary – common in FOXG1 – his teachers also had to learn how to communicate with him.



Cooper, left, and his teacher Kimberley Young at Philip E. Layton School in March. Photo courtesy of Philip E. Layton School

▼ Continued on p. 36

Parenting and virtual learning during a pandemic: A mother's reckoning

by *Sarah Lynch*

The prospect of virtual learning is daunting for any parent. It requires a delicate balancing act of student engagement, independent work and the ability to access online learning. For working parents, having your child at home requires another level of organization, patience and adaptability. For those with special needs children, virtual learning increases the challenges.

As a special education consultant and co-coordinator of the Centre of Excellence for the Physically, Intellectually and Multi-Challenged at the English Montreal School Board, one of my roles is to support students with significant disabilities, who are learning virtually, and their families. After providing guidance and recommendations to others, I found myself in the same situation: working full-time and parenting three children during a pandemic. Suddenly,

I was juggling work and life, with a spirited 11-year-old with Down syndrome who would be learning at home for two weeks in January when his class was sent home as a preventative measure.

My initial reaction was to panic, but I decided to embrace the opportunity and put my professional work to the test. I got my son ready for his second round of virtual learning (the attempt during the first lockdown was an absolute failure).

I felt like a supermom during the first 10 minutes! I led a meeting while my son attended his class. I was already formulating how I could share this positive experience with the special needs network. However, seconds later, my son closed his laptop, not interested in his lesson. I sent an apologetic email to his teacher who replied "well, it went better than in the spring."

I found myself tapping into my patience and adaptability, feeling the same frustrations, fatigue, and highs and lows felt by others, without being critical of myself. My son and I had good and bad moments, periods of learning through play, and daily routines combined with additional screen time. I realized that we were resilient and would get through it together. And I felt better equipped to bring what I learned to the families I help.

My advice to others remains the same: Try your best, love your child, and learning will occur naturally. Be patient and accepting of your limitations and those of your child. Above all, you will discover the superhero in your child and within yourself. ■

Sarah Lynch is a special education consultant at the EMSB and co-coordinator of the CoE PIM.



Kian taking a break from online learning at home in January.

Practicing being mindful of our thoughts

by *Danika Swanson*



In past editions, we learned about and practiced mindful bodies, mindful breathing, mindful listening, and most recently heartfulness – the practice of sending kind thoughts. In this edition, we'll build on some of these tools with a practice for being mindful of our thoughts.

Mindfulness means paying attention to what's happening right now in a kind and curious way. We can notice our thoughts, emotions, sensations, and the people and environment around us. The challenge is that our minds like to wander, and there are many things that pull our attention away from the present moment. A study on mind wandering in adults found that 50 percent of the time our minds are somewhere other than the task at hand. As you read this edition of *Inspirations*, how often have your thoughts wandered off, and you've found yourself ruminating about something that happened in the past, making mental "to do" lists, checking an incoming message or thinking about your next meal or summer plans?

Don't worry, the goal isn't to stop your mind from wandering completely. This is what our minds do, and there are some cognitive benefits to our ability to do this – helping us learn, reason and plan. Our goal

is to notice the patterns of our mind and to strengthen our ability to pay attention so we can when we need to. While we're often told, or are telling others, to "pay attention," we are seldom taught how to pay attention. When we practice paying attention to something during these practices – sound, breath, body sensations, etc. – we strengthen our ability to keep our attention in the present. In addition to helping improve attention and focus, this ability has also been shown to support our overall happiness.

Here's a short practice to help you integrate short moments of mindfulness into your day...for yourself and your kids!

Let's practice:

- ▶ Settle into your mindful body of choice. (Bring body to stillness/quiet. Relaxed, but alert.)
- ▶ Close your eyes or bring your gaze softly in front of you.
- ▶ Rest a hand on your anchor spot, that place where you feel your breath in your body (belly, chest or nostrils).
- ▶ Try to keep your attention on your in and out breath. Notice if/when your mind starts to wander. If it does, you can gently

bring your hand back to your anchor spot, bringing your attention back to the breath.

- ▶ You might notice that your mind is constantly wandering off. That is okay. Just invite your attention back to your breath when you notice this. Getting lost and coming back to the breath is mindfulness.
- ▶ Sit for one minute, noticing when your mind wanders, and bringing your focus back to your breath.

Throughout the week, see if you can notice when your mind starts to wander, and gently invite it back to the present moment. ■

Resources

GoZen! Mindfulness: Observing A Train of Thoughts: <https://youtu.be/F0SWMICwtm0> (1:42)

How to be Mindful During a 'Thought Parade' from Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin-Madison: <https://youtu.be/7F45o-wFjbo> (3:09)

What is MINDFULNESS and how do you do it? (Zen Den) | Cosmic Kids: <https://youtu.be/8rp5bpFIUpq> (7:45)

Mindful Moments with JusTme (#1 Using Breath as Anchor): www.vimeo.com/227543375 (7:50)

Danika Swanson serves as 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 school-age students.

John Grant High walks and talks for autism acceptance



John Grant students in the reading nook wearing their special T-shirts before their Autism Acceptance Walk on May 3. Photo courtesy of John Grant High School

In celebration of Autism Awareness Month in April, John Grant High School organized "Autism Acceptance Walk and Talk." This month-long effort to raise awareness and build a stronger inclusive community for those with autism featured speaker presentations broadcast into classrooms via Google Meet, and a walk - virtually for those at home, and a

live 3km walk for those at school in their class bubbles. Students wore T-shirts designed and decorated by students and printed by Promo 21 bearing the slogan: Why celebrate autism acceptance month? On the autism spectrum, the possibilities are limitless!

Read Jennifer Le Huquet, principal of John Grant's full article on our website.

Telepractice still strong and growing in SLP services

by *Karina Ismail*

It did not take the pandemic for speech-language pathologists (SLPs) across the province to be interested in telepractice and its benefits.

Over the past four years, the Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development (CoE SLD), headquartered at the English Montreal School Board, had been receiving requests from school-based SLPs asking for more support and training on telepractice to ensure the delivery of its services. The Centre has since embarked on a two-year provincial telepractice project, funded by the Ministry of Education (MEQ).

Telepractice is the application of telecommunications technology to deliver professional services at a distance, including assessment, intervention, consultation, mentoring and supervision. It has been recognized as an effective work method and embraced as a valuable and growing virtual service, prior to COVID-19, by professionals across different sectors, such as education and health.

Throughout the pandemic, it has allowed for professional services, such as speech and language services, to remain accessible to students, when needed. It has enabled SLPs to continue offering an array of services to students who present with communication disorders, language disorders and

specific learning disabilities, among others. Services can also be extended to school teams, where sanitary measures are obliged, where professional resources are limited or when distance creates a barrier to the delivery of services.

This last year has been filled with challenges as well as instances that show the admirable dedication of school teams coming together for their students: adapting and finding new ways of teaching and supporting their students. School-based SLPs have been ensuring that communication and learning take place for their students, in spite of the many barriers brought upon by distancing and mask-wearing, which too often reduce the clarity and efficacy of communications. Many SLPs resorted to telepractice to maintain services to their students, as well as keeping the communication factor at the centre of their students' social connections and supporting their learning curves.

Prior to the pandemic, the Centre applied for a Special Education Partnership Project grant in order to provide telepractice training for SLPs and their school teams. In October 2020, the CoE SLD was delighted to receive positive news from the MEQ

along with the grant. Now, completing its first year of a two-year project, the Centre is here to help school boards ensure that telepractice becomes a sustainable practice that is part of the Complementary Educational Services' toolbox – one that facilitates accessibility of SLP services, when judged appropriate, to students and school teams who would not otherwise receive them, or not on a regular basis, with the possibility of a hybrid model.

Telepractice is here to stay! ■

Contact kismail@emsb.qc.ca if you have any questions, would like to obtain our Guide on Telepractice or share your "aha" moments using telepractice with your school teams or students who present with communication disorders.

For information on the CoE SLD, visit www.coesld.ca.

Karina Ismail, M.Sc.(A), is a speech-language pathologist at the English Montreal School Board, and coordinator at the Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development.



The Centre of Excellence for the Physically, Intellectually and Multi-Challenged update

by *Sarah Lynch*

Since last Fall, the English Montreal School Board's Centre of Excellence for the Physically, Intellectually and Multi-Challenged (CoE PIM) has been working to respond to the needs expressed by the special education network. Among them was to create a Competency-Based Approach to Social Participation Education Program (CASP-I) subcommittee and offer collaborations, webinars and initiatives.

The focus has been to support the implementation of CASP-I, which is designed to meet the needs of students with moderate to severe intellectual disabilities between the ages of 6 to 15 in the Anglophone community. Two webinars were given to help support teachers and professionals. Additional guidance was provided to the network regarding accessing online learning for students with significant disabilities,

and a collaboration with the CoE Autism Spectrum Disorders, headquartered at the Lester B. Pearson School Board, resulted in the delivery of a series of comprehensive capsules that provide support, guidance and resources for both teachers and parents.

The Centre's Speech-Language Pathologists (SLP) have also collaborated with members of the Student Services Department. Together with assistive technology consultants, they hosted a webinar in October 2020 entitled "Communicating Beyond Words." Teachers and parents were provided with various hands-on strategies to develop communication skills in both the home and school environment using core vocabulary boards. Future endeavours include collaborating with Lynn Senecal at the Inclusive Schools Network on an

initiative to make early literacy instruction accessible to all.

The CoE PIM was pleased to welcome Elisabeth Christie, speech-language pathologist, to the team for the 2020-21 school year. ■

The Centre will continue offering support in these areas to all school boards and can be contacted at coepim@emsb.qc.ca. Teachers and professionals can view the webinars and capsules on our website www.coepim.ca.

Submitted by the CoE PIM team of Elisabeth Christie, speech-language pathologist; Claudia De Luca, occupational therapist; Sarah Lynch, special education consultant; and Sophia Orfanos, speech-language pathologist, at the English Montreal School Board.

Galileo: Learning, creating, giving back

This school year, even during the pandemic, the English Montreal School Board's (EMSB) Galileo Adult Education Centre in Montreal North has been introducing innovative projects to their Social Integration Services (SIS) and Sociovocational Integration Service (SVIS) Program students. From adding 16 small animals to their pet therapy program, thanks to a generous donation from Friends4Cause, to exploring their inner clown and passion for acting, students continued to learn, grow and explore.

Here are a few of their accomplishments during the 2020-21 school year.



Alfonso Guerriero enjoying a pet therapy session with bunny Andy Warhol in the Art Hive in February.
Photo: Lucrezia Termini

First Art Hive at the EMSB

Galileo's Art Hive is a creative, collaborative space that is all about inclusion, respect and learning. It's a welcoming place to talk, make art, build communities and respond creatively to things that matter in a way that meets the needs and level of functioning of each participant.

The Galileo Hive is helping SIS students build a sense of autonomy, belonging, competency and generosity. It is a calming, quiet zone used to de-escalate a situation or help students regulate themselves. Art is a means of speaking without words. In a special needs population where some individuals struggle to express themselves, here, students are encouraged to share their message through art.

Galileo hopes to open the Hive once a week to the special needs community at large.

—Erica Nicole Onofrio

Collaborative 'keychain initiative' leads to giving back

The CIUSSS West-Central Montreal informed *Inspirations* about the "keychain initiative," which was started by Angelia Escobia, a client of Miriam Home and Services, part of CIUSSS West-Central Montreal. The project entailed assembling keychains featuring inspirational words like "faith," "love" and "miracle" and selling them to raise funds. After hearing that some Galileo SIS students were cooking meals for the needy, Escobia wanted to do something to help others, too.

Galileo students are part of Miriam Home's Community Integration Program for adults aged 21 and over, which aims to help develop social awareness and pre-vocational skills. Escobia presented the keychain idea to Galileo principal, Martina Schiavone. With her approval, and the help of Dominique Hamel, special care counselor at Miriam Home; Isabelle Albert, rehabilitation assistant at Miriam Home; and Matea Dixon, teacher at Galileo, the idea took off.

"This project has allowed students to give back and be active members of the community," said Chantal Forget, program manager for the Community Integration Program at Miriam Home. "They're not



Teachers and students set off to sell keychains at Galileo Adult Education Centre on February 5.
Photo: Matea Dixon

just on the receiving end of services, they're also contributing to society."

The money raised through the keychain sales will go toward making care baskets for the needy in Montreal. Read the full article at www.bit.ly/2R7cXfA.

—Produced by the Communications department of CIUSSS West-Central Montreal

Students talk about success with tech

Concordia University Journalism student Nadia Trudell visited Galileo to interview students for a piece about online learning during the pandemic. Trudell was impressed by the students' positive responses about learning online. They recounted that they "overcame an enormous challenge" and "became more comfortable using technology and video call applications independently," something they never thought possible before. They explained how hands-on training using their class iPads and visual memory aids assisted them in using Microsoft Teams from home. They are a resilient bunch, and their dedication and willingness to learn have been the silver lining of the pandemic. Learn more at <https://adobe.ly/3fmmdoL>.

Using iMovie for virtual storytelling with Hands on Media

Lisa Trotto's SIS class partnered with Jessie Curell (founder and director of Hands on Media) and Learn Quebec to take part in the "I Belong" digital storytelling project. Sixty schools from across Quebec participate each year, and Galileo was excited to represent the special needs community. This seven-week project allows students to hone their newly acquired digital media creation skills and further explore filmmaking, photography, original digital music creation using Garage Band and iMovie. iPads also include built-in inclusivity features, such as VoiceOver, which reads the screen aloud; Zoom, which magnifies the screen; and Assistive Touch, which can adjust the touch screen prompts.

This all culminated in a Film Festival that was held online, to great success, on April 15. View a recording of the festival at <https://bit.ly/3buazXA>.

— Lisa Trotto ■

Erica Nicole Onofrio is an art therapist at Galileo. Lisa Trotto is an SIS teacher at Galileo.

REACH community celebrates new tablets for students with autism

by *Jordan Stoopler*



REACH students reading with the support of their new tablets. Photo: Jessica Davis

As the principal of REACH school of the Riverside School Board, Marie-Helen Goyetche makes use of whatever she can to assist her students with special needs and enhance their learning opportunities. REACH, located in St. Lambert, is an English language school for children and young adults with special needs, ranging from four to 21 years old.

In December, Goyetche submitted a successful application with Autism Speaks Canada (ASC) to receive 15 Samsung tablets for autistic individuals in her school. Samsung Canada is a longstanding partner of Autism Speaks Canada, and together through COVID-19 they've donated 2,000 tablets to autistic Canadians to support online learning opportunities.

"This year, we are focusing on literacy and helping students with their reading and writing," said Goyetche. "By having these tablets, we can make sure each student can learn at their own pace, with their own unique set of tools and set them up for success. They can bring them home or use them at school. It's amazing."

The nationwide program first started in 2014 as a means of helping autistic individuals and their families connect with others. In subsequent years, schools, summer camps and other organizations were also invited to fill out the free online application to receive the tablets.

"We are proud of our partnership with Samsung Canada, which has allowed us to provide meaningful support to REACH," said Krista Leitham, Autism Speaks Canada's National Manager, Community Events. "REACH is an incredible school and we are so glad we could provide these tablets to support their unique programming."

In the wake of the pandemic, the demand for the tablets skyrocketed. Over 4,000 applications from across Canada were received in the first 24 hours of the campaign alone. These accounts were augmented by a 2020 pan-Canadian survey developed by ASC, the McMaster Autism Research Team (MacART) and the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Alliance (CASDA) which pointed to disruptions in education and learning as the single greatest impact on autistic children during the pandemic. Better technology to work from home was identified as a key service need.

Goyetche says the tablets have served as communication devices, giving her students a voice and a platform to express themselves.

"The staff and the parents are so appreciative and grateful," said Goyetche. "This program has definitely made the lives of 15 students better." ■

Visit www.autismspeaks.ca to learn more.

PACC programs help students shine

by *PACC Marketing Committee*

Pearson Adult and Career Centre (PACC) of the Lester B. Pearson School Board, located in Lasalle, offers a unique variety of programs in a welcoming setting for students with diverse learning needs. Our alternative programs, Pathways and Connections, are designed for students aged 16 to 18 who are transitioning from high school to adult education for the first time. These programs help students acquire academic skills through a cohort model with a flexible schedule, a supportive atmosphere, and one-on-one support. Pathways is aimed at students who are ready to complete Secondary 1 and 2, whereas Connections covers Secondary 3 and 4.

SEED is a Sociovocational Integration training program in which students

develop their academic, employment and social skills in a highly supportive classroom environment before participating in work-placements in the community. Successful SEED students earn a certification in a semi-skilled trade.

We offer Pathways, Connections and SEED in a caring, inclusive and vibrant learning environment. We believe these programs will help students reach their personal and academic goals to continue their education, prepare for vocational training or enter the workforce. ■

For information, call Roger Rampersad, centre director or Qaadira De Coteau, assistant centre director at 514-798-5588, local 1.

▼ *FOXG1 continued from p. 32*

Though he is on the CVI spectrum, Cooper has good vision and uses his gaze to make choices, explained McLeod. She said he can express himself using facial expressions, vocalizations and body language.

The school will continue to explore building his communication using his gaze, and they will eventually introduce Eyegaze Edge, a technology that will help him develop the vocabulary to communicate his own thoughts. For now, his teachers rely on personal interaction and their own observation skills to build Cooper's communications skills.

Young said they often use colour, in objects, often musical instruments, as a way to communicate and elicit choices from the student. They start with red and yellow, considered "crisp colours" in CVI work, followed by other colours later on. At the

time of the interview, Cooper was loving blue and orange. When given a choice, Young explained, he would choose to look at the blue drum and would smile.

His exposure to music has revealed that he is "so motivated by music and curious about musical instruments," said Young. "He is a fan of big booming hip hop and Justin Bieber. He doesn't scare easily. He likes it loud!"

Cooper had enjoyed swimming in the PEL pool before it closed, "But his ultimate favourite is the Snoezelen Room," said his mom. "He gets so happy. I say the word 'Snoezelen,' and I see the smile." She said he likes to play with the fibre optic strings and enjoys looking at the bubbles in the massive lava lamps. ■

For more information about FOXG1, visit www.foxg1.org.

Lisa Mancini leads independent life, family cheers her on

by *Lorri Benedik*

“As far back as I can remember, I have enjoyed being in my own space. I have relied on my parents a lot but I’m more confident now and do more for myself.”
—Lisa Mancini



Paul Mancini, Diane Bondaruk, Lisa Mancini and Kris Mancini enjoy some family time in their backyard in Pointe-Claire in the summer of 2019. Photo courtesy of the Mancini family

Diane Bondaruk and Paul Mancini have raised two kids with independent spirits while retaining family closeness. They are mom and dad to Lisa, 27, and Kris, 26. “Lisa was such an easy baby that we decided to have a second child right away,” said Bondaruk. “Then, at 15 months, she somersaulted out of her crib, landed on her feet and never sat still again unless she was watching *Sesame Street*.” By 18 months, Lisa could recite the alphabet and knew her colours but Bondaruk noticed that conversations consisted mostly of Lisa echoing back phrases. Assessments were inconclusive until age six when she was diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder.

“As far back as I can remember, I have enjoyed being in my own space,” said Lisa. “I have relied on my

parents a lot but I’m more confident now and do more for myself.” What contributed to Lisa’s progress was attending Summit School and then Concordia’s Centre for the Arts in Human Development. “Art and drama therapies helped me accept who I am,” continued Lisa. “We performed a play called *No one’s perfect*. I got up and spoke in front of a big audience and hardly felt nervous.” After Concordia, Lisa set her sights on Wagar Adult Education Centre but there was an obstacle. “Wagar only accepts students who take public transit alone and I had not done that yet,” she said. “I practiced all summer, with help from an educator, and succeeded.”

Lisa became more worldly because of several father-daughter trips. “It was awesome to visit Italy, Spain, Japan and go on cruises,” she said. “I even went to Egypt to visit my cousin who lives there.”

Finding the right job was challenging. “I worked in a store but found it boring,” Lisa said. “Daycare work was fun – I loved the cute kiddies but it didn’t feel right.” What

Lisa finds most satisfying is cleaning. She has struggled with anxiety and explained that cleaning properly requires all of her attention, which distracts her from worry. Last year, she got a housekeeping job at Manoir Kirkland seniors’ residence and loves it.

A few months ago, Lisa moved into a one-bedroom apartment close to work. “I love my new place; I do whatever I want and play music as loud as I like,” she said. “Every evening I prepare my favourite snack – two red apples sprinkled with cinnamon.” She maintains her close family connection by having Saturday movie and dinner nights with her parents.

Kris has been living independently for two years. “I am proud of Lisa’s evolution,” he said. “She’d been yearning to live on her own and I’m happy she achieved this goal; my sister is a very capable person.”

Kris and Lisa text or speak every day. “My brother is my role model,” she said. “He has his own condo and I hope to follow in his footsteps.” ■

Autism Canada’s 2020 Au-Some Conference in review

by *Randy Pinsky*

“See the spectrum differently!” challenged Autism Canada at its annual Au-Some Conference on November 28. All presentations were delivered by people with autism, offering firsthand accounts of life experiences and teachings.

Autism Canada’s social media and events coordinator Julie Purkis reinforced how the organization relies on the insight of its Advisory Ambassadors (all who have autism) and Board to provide insight into projects and plan the conference. “I could never speak for someone on the spectrum - I don’t have their experience,” expressed Purkis.

This was the second year the conference took place online. “We’re trying to reach as many people as possible, such as those in [the] territories who don’t have as much support,” said Purkis. “While we say the conference is ‘by autistics for autistics,’ [the resources are] for everyone,” particularly during the pandemic when calls to their family support representative increased by 87 percent.

Autism advocate Dr. Temple Grandin was the conference keynote, and shared her perspective on legitimizing different ways

of thinking. With more videoconferencing these days, she discussed how this is a perfect microcosm of the need for varying skill sets, from graphic designers to coders. “There’s a fit for everyone. Different kinds of minds can complement each other,” said Grandin.

Longtime Autism Canada Ambassador and speaker Katherine Gallagher discussed self-advocacy: “We are our own best source of empowerment because we know ourselves best.” She encouraged self-acceptance over trying to hide one’s autism. “Masking’ removes the opportunity for people to get to know the real us.”

During “AspieComic” Michael McCreary’s presentation, he explained that he is very comfortable with his identity, even joking about it in his book, *Funny, You Don’t Look Autistic*.

Several panelists challenged perceptions of autism such as Victoria McGrath, a

successful businesswoman diagnosed at 50, and Special Olympics athlete Michael Jacques, author of *Can’t Read, Can’t Write, Here’s My Book*.

Non-verbal Andrew S. concluded the conference with a child’s perspective through his letter board: “More than just being an autistic boy, people know I am in here... it was years before my family discovered me.” Participants commented, “Just because [someone] cannot speak doesn’t mean they don’t have anything to say... Andrew is a lesson to all of us: Always presume competence.” ■

Autism Canada is an autism advocacy organization that uses a national perspective to address current issues faced by people with autism, their families and other stakeholders.

For information, visit www.autismcanada.org.



Commission scolaire English-Montréal
English Montreal School Board

EMSB proudly supports *INSPIRATIONS* and our special needs community

An inclusive, internationally-minded community IB World School / École du Monde

Carlyle Elementary School of the English Montreal School Board is a gem located in the Town of Mount-Royal. Their transdisciplinary **International Baccalaureate Programme (IB)** is designed to foster the development of the whole child; personal, social and academic. Their internationally-minded, inquiry-based curriculum, coupled with ongoing reflection and assessment, links active classroom experience to action-based local and global issues.

At **Carlyle**, special needs, gifted, and average students are integrated into every aspect of the school and IB programme.

With respect, critical thinking, tolerance and care within a safe and nurturing environment,

all students fully participate in all school activities, including the Grade 6 IB-PYP Exhibition Project.

The school psychologist, speech and occupational therapists, special education and ASD consultants are always available to consult upon request.

“At **Carlyle**, we all learn to appreciate, welcome and embrace our uniqueness,” said Dina Vourdouis, principal of **Carlyle**. “Special needs students get extra time, support and more contextual assignments. If you focus on the abilities, no one has disabilities. This is a beautiful place to learn and grow,” said Vourdouis.

Additional Programs

- ▶ Bilingual pre-Kindergarten and Kindergarten classes
- ▶ Integration of special needs students in all programs, including the IB-Primary Years Programme
- ▶ Resource support
- ▶ Early literacy intervention
- ▶ STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, Mathematics)
- ▶ Fully equipped Sensory Room
- ▶ Intergenerational Program
- ▶ Intermural sports
- ▶ Leadership Program
- ▶ A fully equipped Games Room

Registration takes place all year long.

- International parents who have a work permit or are studying at any Montreal university may be eligible for their child(ren) to obtain a temporary certificate of eligibility for English core education.
- There are no zoning restrictions for pre-Kindergarten at Carlyle but no buses will be provided for out-of-territory students.



514-738-1256
Daycare: 514-788-0021
www.carlyle.emsb.qc.ca
dvourdouis@emsb.qc.ca



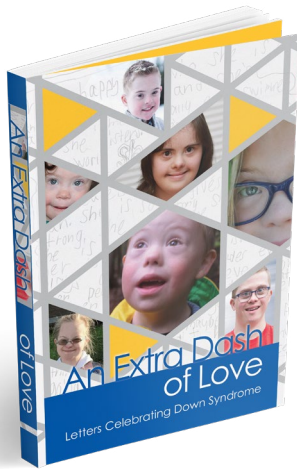
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by *Roanne Weisman*

An Extra Dash of Love: Letters Celebrating Down Syndrome

(Chocolate River Publishing, 2020)

Letters, poems and artwork submitted to the Greater Moncton Down Syndrome Society with a foreword by **Natalie MacMaster**

After the year we have all just endured, everyone could use a hefty dose of joy, compassion, kindness, love and even magic. This little book contains all that and more, most especially giving us hope that life, and the world, can be healed and become whole. The magic is found in every paragraph, poem and joyful drawing. The book is written about and by people with Down syndrome, whom one writer has called “capsules of magic.” Added one contributor, “This should be called ‘Up syndrome,’ since people with this syndrome never bring you down, but instead lift you up.”

The book’s foreword is written by Canadian fiddler Natalie MacMaster, who wrote about her daughter, Sadie, born in 2016 with Down syndrome. “And now, four years later, I want to shout to the world how much I love Sadie; how awesome she is; how great it is to be her mom; what a gift she is to me, her father and her siblings; how much they love her and how she brings out the best in them; how proud I am of her and how I am looking forward to growing old with her...”

This book was the dream of Sandra Blatt-Arsenault, president of the Greater Moncton Down Syndrome Society in New Brunswick. With the help of local media outlets, the organization invited the community, including local schools and organizations, to submit letters, poems, drawings and essays about their loved ones who have Down syndrome. Some submissions were also written by people who have Down syndrome, describing their lives. Perhaps the best way to describe the inspiring contents of this book is through the writers

themselves. Here is a selection of their quotes:

“I once had a friend tell me that our life’s greatest purpose is to give love and receive love. That was 13 years ago. I have pondered that statement numerous times since, only to keep rediscovering its truth.”

–Natalie MacMaster

“... chaque moment inattendu est un bonheur et nous fascine.”

–Laetitia, mère de Raphaëlle, Rouen, France

“If you are a new parent who has just received a Down syndrome diagnosis, please take it from someone who’s been in your shoes, it’s not what you’re expecting. Embrace it, enjoy the journey! We truly are the lucky few.”

–Laurent, Dieppe, NB

The life accomplishments of those with Down syndrome are evident in quotes submitted by family members, including this sibling:

“I was 6 years old when my mom brought home my little brother, Samuel. As I am writing this, I am sitting with him in our basement watching HGTV. He is now approaching 16 years old. I can assure you, he fits the characteristics of a ‘normal teenager’ as some people like to call it. Everybody loves him, he participates in sports (Special Olympics) and after-school events just like everybody else. I have come a long way since being the school-aged girl with a little brother with Down syndrome. Down syndrome, thank you. Sam, thank you for being the best part of my being. You have taught me how to love, how to love all people unconditionally.”

–Veronique, sister of Samuel, Moncton, NB ■

An Extra Dash of Love can be found at Paragraphe Bookstore in Montreal, ordered through Indigo Books or from www.chocolateriver.ca. It costs \$19.95.

Roanne Weisman is an author specializing in science, medicine and healthcare.

Geordie Theatre’s new play explores neurodiversity

by *Cindy Davis*

An exciting project is brewing at Geordie Theatre, in collaboration with Summit School: The creation of a new play that explores neurodiversity. The piece is being co-written by neurodiverse playwright, Steven Patrick Booth, and has a neurodiverse associate director and artists on the team.

The project has been in the works for two years, said Geordie’s artistic associate Jessica Abdallah, when the theatre company ran workshops at Summit School to better understand their audience and

create storylines that would be of interest to the demographic. “It’s the idea of bringing together neurodiverse artists and giving them a voice in terms of how the story is told and what stories they want to tell, and pairing them with artists who are neurotypical and being able to learn and explore together,” said Abdallah. The play is scheduled for January/February 2022.

Geordie’s last project of the 2020 / 2021 season, *Virginia Wolf*, ran online from May 7 to 10. Abdallah said that Geordie’s online model offered live talk-back sessions,

and virtual school “tours” during its run, providing resources and study guides for participating classrooms.

An ASL interpreted performance was planned for May 15. The story of *Virginia Wolf* (deliberately misspelled because of the main character’s “wolfish” mood) is particularly relevant now, said Abdallah, because it touches on the difficult subject of breaking free from feelings of sadness and isolation through creativity and connection. ■



CityNews

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Rising Phoenix

The documentary to watch before the Tokyo 2020 Paralympics



by *Ishini Fernando*

Rising Phoenix, the 2020 Netflix documentary directed by Ian Bonhôte and Peter Ettedgui, tells the story of the Paralympic Games and its athletes. The film combines skillfully arranged clips of old footage of events associated with the Games through the decades. Interviews with insiders provide insight on some of the important moments in history of the Paralympic movement and the people behind it.

Although the story of the Paralympic Games' origins alone could have been the entire documentary, the film focuses on key moments in history, such as how the first form of the Games was actually a small sport competition among wounded British veterans in 1948. What had started out as a small gathering of veterans organized by Dr. Ludwig Guttman that year came to be what we now know as the one of the largest sporting events in the world. The film covers the ups and downs through the decades as it grew, but dedicates more time to the events that led up to the 2016 games held in Rio de Janeiro.

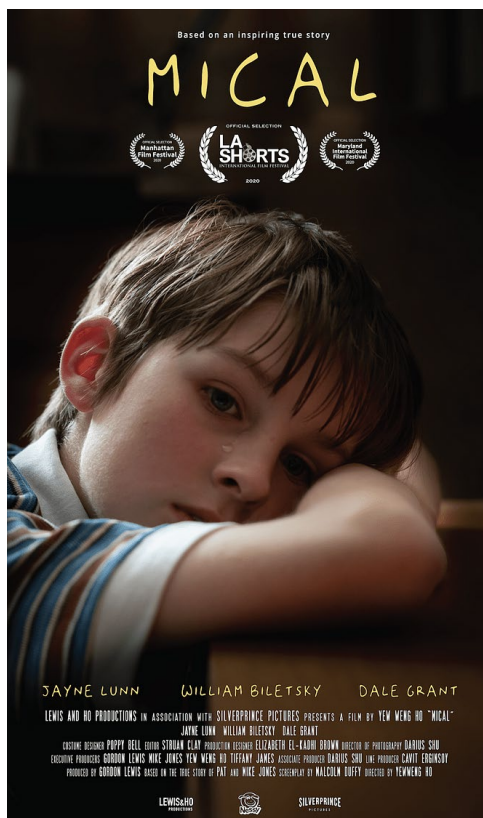
Featuring culturally diverse world-class athletes, the film also dives into the

backstories of nine Paralympians: Bebe Vio, Ellie Cole, Jean-Baptiste Alaize, Jonnie Peacock, Matt Stutzman, Ntando Mahlangu, Tatyana McFadden, Cui Zhe and Ryley Batt. Powerful moments during and outside of competition are shown: a fierce fencer who lost her arms and legs to meningitis desperately fighting to win against the most recent champion, an archer who was born without arms aiming for bull's-eye with his legs, a runner with prosthetic legs racing a cheetah, and more.

It is impossible not to get invested as they share their stories, the obstacles they have surmounted, and the reasons behind why they do what they do. Their fortitude, perseverance and determination are evident

in their accomplishments, and the film does a great job at capturing them in their element.

Complete with cinematic montages, *Rising Phoenix* is vibrant, informative and powerful. The film successfully demonstrates the global impact of the Paralympic Games in changing perceptions of people with disabilities, empowering athletes and redefining excellence in sport. Its release was initially set to coincide with the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic Games, but since it was announced that the Games were postponed to this August, it is the perfect watch to get in the mood to cheer on Canadian Paralympians as they prepare to compete. ■



MiCAL

A boy's struggle with dyslexia

by *Randy Pinsky*

Released in 2020, *MiCAL* is an independent Silverprince Pictures production and an Official Selection at the 2020 Oscar-qualifying L.A. Shorts International Film Festival. Set in the United Kingdom, it chronicles seven-year-old Michael Jones' efforts to make sense of words while living with dyslexia.

In the film, Michael's teacher has little patience for his inability to read out loud. Their conversation goes as follows:

Teacher: "There's no excuse for being lazy, Jones."

Michael: "I'm not lazy, miss."
Teacher: "Then maybe you're just stupid."

Outside the class, bullies taunt him, calling him "Zero Boy" and stating "He can't even spell his own name!" This was the impetus for the title of this movie.

While Michael's father reiterates he is "just a slow learner," his mother, Pat Jones, is more concerned, recounting an episode where, during a spelling test, Michael copied all the words from the boy next to him. He got zero. "Our son can't even copy. There's slow, and then there's dead stop," she said.

For those with dyslexia, letters seem to switch around or appear confusingly similar, making reading a struggle. The challenge to decode words is effectively depicted as Michael grapples with a book, willing the words to make sense. As he forces himself to concentrate, comments from his teacher, classmates and parents

swirl in his head. He visibly gets more and more agitated and finally throws a fit, whimpering to his mother, "Why am I different?"

With no dyslexia specialists at school or funds to hire one, Pat Jones takes it upon herself to develop teaching tools to help her son. When she proposes exchanging them for reduced school fees, she is told, "But we have no one in our school with dyslexia."

In the face of the doubters and disbelievers, Pat would go on to launch the Nessy Learning Center and the Bristol Dyslexia Centre, earning an Order of the British Empire in 2015.

Michael's mother's determination to help her son read, is effectively evoked in the film's background song "Sunny:" "You gave to me/ Your all and all / Now I feel/ Ten feet tall/ Sunny, one so true/ I love you." ■

■ *MiCAL* can be viewed on Prime Video.

INSPIRATIONAL EATS

Throughout most of the COVID-19 pandemic, restaurants have only been able to provide take-out and delivery service. For individuals with special needs, services like curbside pickup have been most convenient. Naturally, home delivery is even more convenient.

Here are some dining tips.



La Cage - Brasserie sportive's Salmon poke bowl.



Petinos for breakfast and lunch

One of the things I have really missed since the pandemic started is a good early-morning breakfast at some of my favourite restaurant spots. I jumped at the offer to drop by Petinos in the Sainte-Dorothée district of Laval for a pick-up before reporting to work recently.

There are 17 Petinos franchises in Quebec. Harry Sikellis owns the Laval, Charlemagne and Dollard des Ormeaux locations. The Laval restaurant is open daily from 8 am to 3 pm for breakfast and lunch pick-up and delivery orders. Charlemagne (near

by *Mike Cohen*

La Cage - Brasserie sportive's take-out service has become a true discovery for diners. In the winter of 2020, just a few weeks before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, I was so excited to attend the grand opening of the new La Cage - Brasserie sportive (www.cage.ca) at the former P.F. Chang's location at rue des Jockeys near Decarie Blvd.

Formerly known as La Cage aux Sports, the two-level, 317-seat restaurant barely had a chance to attract a following and showcase its \$1.5-million makeover before shutting its doors.

Groupe Sportscene president and CEO Jean Bédard slowly began to open the 37 La Cage properties in Quebec last June. The company also owns breakfast restaurant L'Avenue on the South Shore, P.F. Chang's at Carrefour Laval and Moishes Steakhouse. The latter just had its iconic property on St. Laurent Blvd. sold. It will resurface sometime after the pandemic is over at a new venue.

La Cage has transitioned marvelously to the present situation by launching "La Cage chez vous," an enhanced offering of delivery, take-out and ready-to-cook meals.

For my mother-in-law and father-in-law, bag number one was dropped off containing a Blitz (100 percent Canadian beef patty) with lettuce, tomato, red onion and mustard only, and a fresh Atlantic salmon, served with croutons. They were pleasantly surprised, so much so that they will order the exact same things next time. In

my household, we ordered an appetizer of three lobster tacos, a green salad, two salmon poke bowls and a salmon tartare meal, coming with fries and a salad.

We miss a lot of things about Moishes, so it was a treat to order the famous Moishes millefeuille for dessert. The tacos were fantastic, so it was a pleasant surprise to be treated with some ready-to-cook kits created by executive chef Louis-François Marcotte! ■

The famous Moishes millefeuille.



La Cage - Brasserie sportive Decarie is located at 5485 rue des Jockeys, Montreal, QC H4P 2T7.

Hours of operation are Monday to Friday (11 am to 11 pm) and Saturday and Sunday (4 pm to 11 pm). You can order via lacagechezvous.com, ubereats.com or doordash.com or call (514) 731-2020. And the entrance is perfectly placed for curbside pick-up.

Terrebonne) and DDO have the same hours, but are only open Friday, Saturday and Sunday. Curbside pick-up is available at all of them.

Here is my advice: treat yourself to breakfast first. I enjoyed my combo selection called "The American," which included two eggs over-easy, a prime AAA 10-ounce sirloin steak, tomatoes, onion, pickles, home fries, baked beans, toast and coffee. Once I was there, I also ordered something to place in my fridge for lunch. The smoked salmon platter included a nice serving of smoked salmon, a bagel, cream cheese, tomatoes, capers, onions, asparagus, sliced

olives and lemon. I added in a fruit cup. For dessert, I ordered the Montérégie, half waffle with English cream, Nutella and Oreo crumbles. Wow! ■

Check out the Laval, Charlemagne and Dollard des Ormeaux locations in particular.

Laval: 540 Autoroute 13, (450) 689-5444; Charlemagne: 65 rue Émile-Despins, (450) 654-6866; DDO: 3520 Sources Blvd, (514) 685-1161. Order via UberEats and DoorDash for all locations and SkipTheDishes in Laval and DDO.

For more information: www.petinos.ca.



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Children with ASD at School: Inclusion, Integration, and Improvement"

Dr. Connie Kasari

Distinguished Professor with a joint appointment in the UCLA School of Education Human Development and Psychology and the School of Medicine, Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behavior, and the Center for Autism Research and Treatment



Meeting the mental health needs of youth and adults with neurodevelopmental disabilities during COVID-19 and beyond: Lessons learned from families

Dr. Yona Lunsky

Director, Azrieli Adult Neurodevelopmental Centre, Senior Scientist, Adult Neurodevelopment and Geriatric Psychiatry Division, and Director, Health Care Access Research and Developmental Disabilities (H-CARDD) Program CAMH



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