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INSPIRATIONS

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Jonas rocks new Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton campus!

Singer-songwriter Jonas Tomalty participated in the Reverse Integration program at the Mackay Centre School in Grade 5. He returned to the school's new campus in N.D.G. for the ribbon-cutting ceremony on September 25.

Read our special report on the opening of the new Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools on pages 6 to 9.

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'Choose Love' for change ... page 39



Trevor Paul (left), River Fraser (right) with Jonas Tomalty.



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MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR

By Mike Cohen

As the founding editor of *Inspirations*, I am exceptionally proud to celebrate our 10th anniversary and share with readers how we got here.

When I was hired as the communications and marketing specialist at the English Montreal School Board in 1999, one of the first things I did was create a newspaper called the *EMSB Express*. One of the features in each edition focused on our special needs community. There were so many good stories to follow up, I felt the time had come to introduce a stand-alone publication. Hence one night I picked up the phone and called my colleague Lew Lewis, the director of Student Services, at home with this idea. Would his department partner with me to launch a newspaper I had already dubbed *Inspirations*? Lew liked the idea and in a matter of days the project got underway.

The first edition of *Inspirations* was 12 pages with a few interesting local stories and minimal advertising and circulation. Feedback was excellent as people appreciated the fact we had taken such an initiative. Shortly after this first print edition came out, I ran into my friend Wendy Singer and showed her a copy. Little did I realize that my invitation for Wendy to "get involved" would lead to *Inspirations* becoming such a tour de force in this province. Wendy had no prior experience running a newspaper nor any specific background with issues related to special needs. In a very short period of time she became a true "go to" person. I named her managing editor and coordinator of operations. She handled layout, design, writing assignments, circulation and advertising. A team of collabora-

tors began to take shape. Circulation expanded and our reputation in the special needs community began to grow.

Inspirations has grown to more than two print editions of more than 40 pages yearly. In between two or three special Arts & Leisure editions are produced, online only or with smaller print runs. We are present with display tables at different events and have gravitated towards organizing and participating in conferences. Retired teacher Linda Mahler is our coordinator of educational outreach and maintains important contact with the pedagogical community and assists with special events. Wendy has become the de facto communications expert on special needs issues for the EMSB, which supports our mission administratively. We are a non-profit publication and rely on advertising to cover our expenses. Fortunately we have done very well in this area.

Inspirations clearly filled a giant void in our community. The fact that we have added more French content to each edition shows there is need for information for that segment of the population as well. I love hearing from parents who rave about what a ray of sunshine we bring into the lives of their families or those who may not have loved ones with special needs but appreciate this exercise in sensitization.

There is only one direction for *Inspirations* to go and that is up. Please share this newspaper with anyone who has never read it before, like our Facebook page and follow us online. We continue to grow and welcome everyone to be part of our mission. *

Reflecting on 10 years of *Inspirations*

By Lew Lewis

our francophone counterparts within the special needs community – this initiative has been most impressive!

I would like to extend our sincere appreciation to the many individuals (too numerous to mention) who have played a significant role in the success of *Inspirations*. As well, a huge vote of thanks is extended to Mike Cohen, who initially conceived of this very worthwhile publication after which he "inspired" others (myself included) to become integral partners in this very exciting initiative.

On behalf of all the individuals who contribute to the high quality of *Inspirations*, we look forward to continuing to be "inspired" by this endeavor for many years to come.

Lew Lewis is the director of Student Services at the English Montreal School Board. *



Julie René de Cotret, Lew Lewis, and Pina Evangelista at the Transition Planning seminar at the English Montreal School Board in January 2018. (Photo, Wendy Singer)



The Dynamic Funds Teacher Team of Inspiration 2018: The Phys Ed teams at the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools

By Cindy Davis

During a long day at school, every kid loves the freedom and joy of Phys Ed class. But how do you accomplish that when the children in a class have myriad physical and communication challenges? The extraordinary physical education, swimming and movement resource teachers at The Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools (PEL) pour their hearts into doing just that.

The two schools are housed in the same new and beautiful facility in N.D.G. and share resources, but their students have very different needs. Mackay accommodates students with motor, language and communication disorders, as well as students with developmental, intellectual and auditory impairments. Philip E. Layton's students have many of these same issues with visual impairments as well. The Phys Ed teams have unique approaches, but both have a major impact on the lives of their students.

This Dynamic Funds Teaching Team of Inspiration is being recognized for their passion, creativity and dedication to their work. At Mackay, the teaching team consists of Bob Simpson and Natalie Smith, along with resource teacher Derek Nichols, and at PEL, the program is led by Jonathan Varghese and Vanessa Sayer.

At Mackay, students range in age from pre-k to Grade 6 as well as a senior class with students up to the age of 21. The Phys Ed team also teaches a satellite class from Westmount High School that is fondly referred to as "Leaders on Wheels." With the aid of on-site physio and occupational therapists and psychologists, the Phys Ed team customizes classes around the various obstacles facing their students. "We tailor the program to the abilities and the needs of the kids, whatever they may be, while following the Quebec education program and progressions of learning that are the basis of all school Phys Ed programs," says Simpson. The team is also able to access specialized equipment that is normally used in physiotherapy type settings to create games and activities in the gym.



*The Dynamic Funds Teacher Team of Inspiration 2018
Jonathan Varghese, Vanessa Sayer, Bob Simpson, Natalie Smith and Derek Nichols.*

A highlight of the Phys Ed program is training a group of Mackay and PEL students to take part in the Défi Sportif each year, during which students compete in various athletic categories including gymnastics, swimming, and boccia. Under this team's leadership, both schools often place very well at the games.

The key to teaching Phys Ed to children with limited mobility and various health issues is to be creative, says Natalie Smith. "You have to really think outside of the box." She explains that even something as simple as catching a ball can be difficult or impossible for some students, so games must be modified to enable some students to use a different sized ball, or to catch with their feet, as an example.

At PEL, Phys Ed looks a little different. Most of the 40 students at the school require a quieter Phys Ed time with one-on-one interaction. "Kids receive 92 percent of information through their eyes, so right off the bat we can't do the same

activities as others," says Varghese. "Most can't participate in recess, they can't go outside, so the programs to get them out of their chairs, or establish safe spaces to move and explore are such a big deal for them." Even something as simple as knowing where you are is a challenge when you can't see, he says, and the students must constantly be made aware of their surroundings and be asked if it is okay to be approached. The students have mat time, during which they practice a non-manipulative and creative approach called somatic movement education, or supporting inward directed movement, the basis of which is that when a child feels supported he or she can take the next step forward. Varghese has spent years learning and becoming certified in this approach. His colleague, Vanessa Sayer says she learns as much from the children as they learn from her. "It's motivating to watch the children achieve what they can do."

For both Phys Ed teams, swimming plays a critical role in their curriculum, and is

the time when students have the most opportunity to be free from their limitations. "When a child who has limited mobility gets to go swimming, it allows them to move more – they don't have gravity fighting them," says Smith. "Often times they feel that they don't have control over so many things in their lives and they get in the pool and they suddenly have control."

Patrizia Ciccarelli, principal at both Mackay and PEL Schools, is thrilled that the Phys Ed teaching teams are being recognized with this award. "They are passionate about their work with these students and are exemplary in their approach. They really have embodied the meaning of differentiation. They have a solid understanding of the individual needs of the students and make adaptations and modifications not only to the curriculum but to their teaching strategies so they can be effective and be able to engage all of the students in their care."

Thanks to this extraordinary team, these students have a chance to be active and play – as all kids should.

*If you would like to nominate a Caregiver or Caregiver Team of Inspiration, email me at cindyinspirations@gmail.com. **

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C.A.R.E. Centre students thrive on daily interaction

By Elaine Cohen

C.A.R.E. Centre clients transform each weekday into an enlightening adventure, whether honing skills at Wagar Adult Education Centre in Côte Saint-Luc, gleaning culture about town or embracing nature at summer and winter camps.

Rain, shine or snow, the 25-member adult contingent is on the go, observes Executive Director Olivia Quesnel of Centre d'activités récréatives et éducatives (C.A.R.E.) and an EMSB teacher. Quesnel attends to administration and teaches one of the three classes held from 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, at Wagar. Each student receives a caregiver's one-on-one assistance during programs and for ADLs (Activities of Daily Living).

C.A.R.E., a non-profit, charitable organization incorporated in 1995, partners with the EMSB, government agencies, foundations and private donors to provide resources for adults with physical disabilities and complex medical needs. A 21st birthday marks the cut-off age for government support; therefore, students with special needs are ineligible for educational and recreational support they formerly received at the Mackay Centre School and other facilities. Scarce resources complicate finding social outlets and employment for adults with physical disabilities.



Students at C.A.R.E. Centre, along with some staff, take time out for a photo. (Photo, C.A.R.E. Centre)



Student Caroline Baldasarre and caregiver Chanelle Mantha explore school grounds on the Duet Wheelchair Bicycle Tandem. (Photo, C.A.R.E. Centre)

C.A.R.E. is the sole English program of its kind in Montreal that conducts educational and respite programs, year-round day trips to theatres, museums, sports

complexes and umpteen events as well as camps for adults, 21-plus.

"All our clients have physical disabilities, the majority use wheelchairs or mobility aids and many are non-verbal," Quesnel explains. "We assist students that use augmentative and alternative communication methods. A few use their eyes to communicate. Some of our students have audited CEGEP level courses and are well-versed in psychology and politics."

Programs at the centre cover nutrition, cooking, reading, math, geography, languages, science, music theory, physical activities, animal therapy, art therapy, emotional awareness, yoga, world religions, C.A.R.E. radio, creative writing, personal goals, social interaction and more.

C.A.R.E. received a marvelous gift this past June, when the family of the late Charlotte Duchenes-Best donated a state-of-the-art Duet Wheelchair Bicycle Tandem to the centre in her memory. She passed away in November 2017.

"Charlotte attended our centre for three years and is fondly remembered," Ques-

nel recalls, adding her classmates and staff were her friends and miss her. No doubt, she would be proud to know the pleasure they derive from her gift. The duet includes a wheelchair front and a bicycle in the back. Caregivers serve as keen cyclists guiding the way to local parks and through school grounds.

For information or inquiries about C.A.R.E Centre, contact Olivia Quesnel at 514-483-7200 x 6205. *

INSPIRATIONS



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Student Athena Russel with EMSB mascot Bumble and teacher Dana Strohl.

A state-of-the-art school for students and staff

The construction of a new campus for the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton (PEL) Schools was the result of a team effort on the part of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), the schools' administration and parents five years ago. Their proposal was clear: more space for modern equipment and technology was needed for the education and medical care of the children.

With much lobbying, and three years of planning and construction, the dream of a new campus has come true. Project manager Daniel Hogue ensured that the 186 Mackay Centre and PEL students and 130 staff began the 2018-2019 school year at their brand new state-of-the-art campus located at 6333 Rue de Terrebonne in N.D.G.

On September 25, the EMSB community, MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation staff, politicians, community members and students inaugurated the new campus at a jovial ribbon-cutting ceremony in the school's gym.

"This new campus was born of a collective effort. We knew the quality of education was second to none, and the administration, staff and parents were passionately involved in giving the best to the students, regardless of the facility. But they deserved much more," shared

New campus for Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools

By Wendy Singer

EMSB Chairman Angela Mancini at the ceremony.

The schools accommodate students with motor, language and communication disorders, as well as students with developmental, intellectual, auditory impairments, visual impairments and many other disorders or organic impairments. It is the only one of its kind to offer specialized education following the MEES curriculum and rehabilitative services for the anglophone community. Its supra-regional mandate means that students from all nine Quebec English School Boards can attend this school, where educators and rehab specialists work together to ensure that students are educated and have their medical needs attended to all under the same roof.

The entire facility, spanning 9,454 square meters, has been carefully designed to cater to the diverse needs of its student population. The school is fully accessible. It is bright, featuring an abundance of natural light, spacious classrooms and playgrounds, the latest technology and furniture, a pool, a Snoezelen room, physio and occupational therapy gyms, music and other therapy rooms, nursing stations, and nutrition rooms.

At the heart and soul of the schools is Principal Patrizia Ciccarelli, who worked closely with the architects, the Mackay and PEL education team and the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre team on the planning, organization and development of the new campus.

"The building alone cannot create the vision and passion that guide the development of the two schools. It is the human spirit and interaction between teachers, therapists, child care workers, daycare educators, PABs (beneficiary attendants) nursing staff, and all of our personnel, with our students which will make the difference and ensure the new building supports higher levels of learning and



MAB-Mackay rehabilitation team makes education possible for Mackay Centre and PEL students

The Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton (PEL) Schools and the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre have a longstanding partnership that is governed by an entente between the Ministry of Health and Social Services and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEES), under the umbrella of the CIUSSS West-Central Montreal.

cialists under the same roof during their school day.

Working hand-in-hand with a team of 85 educators and child care workers, the rehab team of 53 includes physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, a psychologist, a social worker, specialized rehab educators, technology assistants, a music ther-



Vice principal of the Mackay Centre and PEL Schools Greg Watson and student Jucika Komlosi. (Photo, Nur Erdem)



Ethan Botner, M^e Nathalie Lauzière, Mark Tukalak, and Yan Fagundes at the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the Mackay Centre and PEL Schools. (Photo, Andrea DiTomaso)

pist, PABs (beneficiary attendants), nurse clinicians, licensed nurse practitioners, an orientation mobility specialist, a vision rehabilitation specialist, an administrative agent, clinical coordinator and program manager.

During the school day, the nursing team at

Continued on page 7

quality services," said Ciccarelli in her speech at the ceremony.

Mancini wished the teams and students great success moving forward in the new facility. "In this campus, staff will be able to continue their excellent and ex-

ceptional work that they do with these students," she said. "We could not have done any of this without the support of so many. Thank you to the parents for their tireless efforts. These parents are the unsung heroes." *



Ann Marie Matheson, Patrizia Ciccarelli, Angela Mancini, Kathleen Weil, Sylvia Lo Bianco, and EMSB mascot Bumble prepare to cut the cake at the ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new Mackay Centre and PEL Schools campus. (Photo, Nur Erdem)

tends to the students' needs. This includes administering medications, assisting with feeding, suctioning, nursing care and attending to medical emergencies.

Alison Leduc, Program Manager for the Rehabilitation Program in Specialized Schools (RPSS) of the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre, explains that in order to be accepted to one of these schools, a joint admissions committee (staffed by school and rehabilitation teams) uses guidelines set by the Ministries to evaluate if the student meets the criteria for rehabilitation services and admission to the school in question.

According to Hema Patel, clinical coordinator of RPSS, the teams meet regularly to discuss the children and plan their therapies. "The new facility is well equipped to meet the needs of the students," she said.

The rehabilitation team connects with other teams within the CIUSSS West-Central Montreal network, of which MAB-Mackay is a member institution, as well as other hospitals and CLSCs in the Montreal region and beyond. "It's a real team effort," added Leduc. "Communication is key."

The MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre continues to provide specialized clinics for the students including low vision, feeding, and orthopedics at their Deca-

rie Boulevard and Sherbrooke Street locations. The new campus has a satellite seating and assistive technology workshop for equipment repairs, making this much easier on families.

Both occupational therapists by training, Leduc and Patel take great reward in witnessing the progress of their students. "Our students don't see themselves as having a disability. They are working towards 'what I can do.' We draw strength from their successes," shared Patel.

"This is a unique, special place," added Leduc. "It always has been." *



Student Arcangelo Salera is all smiles at the new campus. (Photo, Nur Erdem)

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Reverse Integration fundamentally changed Jonas

By Wendy Singer

The English Montreal School Board and the Mackay Centre School began a Reverse Integration program in 1973 in which a limited number of children in pre-kindergarten through Grade 6 are given the opportunity to attend the Mackay Centre School for one year. Reverse Integration students follow the regular curriculum, learning alongside students with physical disabilities.



Students Trevor Paul, River Fraser, and Maurice Abdelahad, with Jonas Tomalty and teacher Leslie Levinson.

The program boasts small class sizes, smart TV's in each classroom, weekly swimming and computer classes, and the opportunity to learn and play with children who use sign language, voice synthesizers, and adapted equipment for recreation and mobility.

Renowned singer-songwriter Jonas Tomalty was born in N.D.G. and raised in Lachine. He spent a memorable Grade 5 year in the Reverse Integration program, and was thrilled to attend the recent ribbon-cutting ceremony at the new campus.

Tomalty credits his independent streak and willingness for new adventures as the catalyst for his parents to enroll him in Mackay's Reverse Integration program. "I was at the perfect age. I was young enough not to have developed too many pre-judgements and to be taught about the humanity and love that we all share," he said. "Something like disability does not change those fundamentals."

Some 30 years later, this talented and charming musician still regularly refers to the lessons he learnt at Mackay in his music, his friendships, and in different communities. "It changed me fundamentally as a little human," shared Tomalty. "I still instinctively see the person inside

before I see the person outside. The love and acceptance being reverberated and taught by the teachers made it easy to absorb, and apply them regularly for the rest of my life."

Reflecting on the Reverse Integration program, Tomalty believes it takes a particular kind of student to benefit from the program. "It can be a challenge to jump into a new environment and then go back to your regular school. It was so absolutely worth it for a kid like me," added Jonas.

To apply for the Reverse Integration program, complete and submit two copies of the application form which you can find on the Mackay Centre School website (www.mackay.emsb.qc.ca) and mail or fax it to 514-487-3676 by February 15, 2019. Please note that children with special needs or IEP's are not eligible to apply.

*More applications are received than available spaces, so unfortunately not all students are eligible for admission. For more information about the program and the acceptance procedures, contact Principal Patrizia Ciccarelli at 514-483-0550, extension 1253. **



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Jooay app: Connecting youth with disabilities across Canada to leisure activities

By Cindy Davis

Parents of children with disabilities can often find it hard to know what leisure activities and resources are out there in their own community. That's why in 2015, a group of researchers from McGill University in Montreal created an app called Jooay. Lead by Dr. Keiko Shikako-Thomas and Dr. Annette Matherne, Jooay is a free app that connects parents, teachers and rehabilitation professionals with leisure opportunities and resources located near them.

Launched first here in Quebec following a series of stakeholder consultations, the

app is now available in all provinces, has almost 3,000 subscribers across Canada, and is about to launch in Australia. Last month, Jooay launched its newest iteration with many improvements based on feedback from its users.

According to research conducted by the Jooay team on Quebec parents of children with cerebral palsy, the number one area in their children's lives upon which they feel could be improved would be in the category of leisure activities, yet 83 percent of those same parents surveyed said they had no idea where to find out

what resources existed. Based on these findings, the newest version includes a chat feature which enables users to discuss events and ideas in a particular area. In addition, geolocation has been added to let users know when there is something occurring in their vicinity. A new Facebook group called Community Connecting to Play: Jooay has been created to enable users to exchange ideas and build community. Newsroom and review features have also been included to keep the app interactive. The team is working on "gamification" of the app by creating a reward system as a way to build community and interest around leisure.

One of the goals of Jooay, says Shikako-Thomas, is to use data gathered by the app to inform policy. "There is always an objective to create a more inclusive system," she says. "We have a very comprehensive list of activities across Canada

and we can see that there is unequal distribution across the country. There is a lot offered in the major cities but very little in the regions. We want to be able to direct policy to enable all children to have the right to play – regardless of where you live."

For Shikako-Thomas and her team, Jooay's growth over the past few years has been very exciting. "Creating a concrete product that is based on research evidence but that also responds to a real need and that can help children across Canada and other places is rewarding," she says. "Hopefully, we're doing something that can help families, professionals and communities to support all children to engage in the activities that are crucial for their health and development."

For information, visit www.jooay.com. *

A dream inclusive playground in the works

By Wendy Singer

The United Nations Conventions on the Rights of Children and the Rights of Persons with Disabilities state that play is a human right for all children. However, most playgrounds do not offer accessible opportunities for children with disabilities, neglecting their right to play.

This is all about to change at the new Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools campus in N.D.G. with a brand new, fully inclusive and accessible playground set to open in the summer of 2019.

With funding from the Centre de recherche interdisciplinaire en réadaptation du Montréal métropolitain (CRIR), a research team embarked on supporting the development of this playground through the PLAY project – Participation in Leisure through Accessible Playgrounds - in the spring of 2017. Their goal was to design the "Dream Inclusive Playground."

The research team included Dr. Keiko Shikako-Thomas, Canada Research Chair in childhood disability, assistant profes-



Dr. Keiko Shikako-Thomas and Dr. Mehrnoosh Movahed collaborate on the PLAY project.

sor in the Faculty of Occupational Therapy at McGill University, and head of the Participation and Knowledge Translations (PAR-KT) Lab; Dr. Mehrnoosh Movahed, research associate in the PAR-KT lab; occupational therapists Emily Scarozzi, Isabelle Cormier, and Alison Leduc from the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre; Tiiu Poldma, professor in Design from Université de Montréal; and Monica Slanik, occupational therapist and knowledge broker for Universal Design and Inclusive Play principles.

The process included a literature search of policy-related legislation and regulations and available equipment on the market, and feedback from stakeholders, including children with disabilities, their parents, teachers, PABs (beneficiary

attendants), and clinicians. A total of 108 questionnaires that asked for preference of various types of play structures were completed by stakeholders. Mohaved conducted focus groups with 12 sets of parents in five different playgrounds while their children worked with their physiotherapist. "While at the playground it was easier to point out barriers in their daily play," shared Mohaved.

"Accessible playgrounds have tended to be very prescriptive and offer only one option for accessible play. They don't take into consideration the opportunities that should be fostered in playgrounds like how children interact, learn together, and how educators or PABs can use the space for growth and learning in addition to play," shared Shikako-Thomas. "Accessibility is usually an afterthought. We had the opportunity to design this playground with accessibility as the first concern, and using research evidence and kids' opinions to support that."

A design team (M. Mehdi (Tiam) Maeiyat, Aram Arshadi, and Faramarz Ghaffarpasand) incorporated the PLAY research teams' recommendations into a state-of-the-art playground plan. It features a tricycle track, accessible swings, double slides, social interaction zones, an accessible zip line, spinner, and sand table, table tennis, music zone, sensory walls,

and much more. The plan includes auditory and vibration feedback equipment for those who have hearing impairments, colour zones respecting better contrast norms, shades, and engraved tactile maps for those with visual impairments.

Building the dream inclusive playground has high costs. According to Mackay Centre and PEL Schools Principal Patrizia Ciccarelli, the Sami Fruits Foundation has been raising funds for the playground over the past seven years, and has already raised \$350,000 that will be devoted to the construction of the playground. The MAB-Mackay Foundation is reaching out to the potential donors to raise more funds for the construction of the playground.

Movahed is eagerly anticipating the first day the students see their playground. "They are going to be so excited to see the variety of activities that are accessible to them," said Mohaved.

Shikako-Thomas' work is not done yet. The team plans to use this process as a model to inform municipalities and policy makers on the importance of inclusive play at a policy dialogue meeting in December.

For information on the accessibility of local playgrounds, visit <http://strollerparking.ca>. *



Notebook

Notes on celebrating 10 years of *Inspirations*

When *Inspirations* editor Mike Cohen showed me the first edition of *Inspirations* 10 years ago, I was inspired. It was brimming with stories of perseverance and achievement, and resources that supported the special needs community. I wanted to be involved.

That summer, Mike asked me to expand the English Montreal School Board's (EMSB) database of special needs re-

ents of children with special needs, act as our special advisors. Columnists Jay Jones-Doyle and Steven Atme share their successes and concerns in each edition. Fay Schipper, volunteer database consultant and accessibility reporter, keeps us in check at every turn.

We are proud to collaborate with amazing and hardworking students from Summit T.E.C.C., John Grant High School, L.I.F.E. Program at the Lester B. Pearson School Board, and CDC Vimont at the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board, who help us with the distribution of *Inspirations* and in turn receive valuable work experience.



The *Inspirations* team celebrates 10 years! Present for a group photo were: Front row: Mike Cohen, Fay Schipper, Wendy Singer. Back row: Cindy Davis, Daniel Smajovits, Elaine Cohen, Rikee Gutherz-Madoff, Liane Langlois, Linda Mahler, Stephanie Paquette, Manon Bourassa, and Nur Erdem.

sources. This entailed contacting service providers in the community and inviting them to list their resources in the database. They, too, were interested in becoming involved with *Inspirations*. They had stories to share, or advertisements, or both.

Over time, we saw *Inspirations* grow from a 12-page EMSB-focused newsletter to a 44-page publication that services the Greater Montreal and surrounding areas. Our growth has been organic and community-driven from the get-go.

The guidance of our readers and our partnerships with people with special needs, parents, and service providers is what guides us, and ensures that we produce publications with integrity. Nick Katalifos and Joanne Charron, both par-

rewarding to the *Inspirations* team, and it is our plan to continue building in this direction.

The support of the EMSB has brought us to where we are today. We thank them, our sponsors Dynamic Funds and Make It Matter, and our loyal advertisers, for their faith in our work. We are also grateful to have an impressive list of contributors who share their knowledge in each edition.

Mike Cohen's extraordinary vision and creativity brought *Inspirations* to life. Our team has grown it into the reputable resource that it is today. We are repeatedly inspired by the successes and challenges of our readers, and thank you for supporting us over the past 10 years. We look forward to many more!



By Wendy Singer



Fourth-year medical students Aselin Weng and Brian Tran presented their research project "Implementation of Deaf cultural competency training in the McGill Faculty of Medicine's undergraduate medical curriculum" at the McGill Health Care Access for Linguistic Minorities conference on September 7.

Weng, also the executive director of Seeing Voices Montreal, and Tran chose this topic because they saw the barriers to health care that exist for people who are deaf.

Their research looks at the efficacy of a one-hour lecture on Deaf Cultural Competency and its effectiveness if it were to be integrated into the medical school curriculum. Study participants take part in a simulated lecture to see how effective it can be. Weng and Tran report that the results have been promising, but a bigger study is necessary in order to ac-



Aselin Weng, Dr. James MacDougall, Dr. Shazia Siddiqi, Brian Tran, and Dr. Jennifer Paige MacDougall at the McGill Health Care Access for Linguistic Minorities conference on September 7. (Photo, McGill Institute of Health and Social Policy)

cumulate convincing data to present to medical schools. To increase study numbers, Weng and Tran will expand the demographics of their work to include medical students of all four years, as well as McGill family medicine residents.



Palmarino DiMarco gave Philippe Manning \$1,600 that he raised at his video game tournament to benefit Proset Autism in September.

Palmarino DiMarco is a 16-year-old student in Grade 11 at St. Thomas High School of the Lester B. Pearson School Board. When he was a young child, DiMarco was diagnosed with a receptive and expressive speech delay as well as autism. Later in elementary school, he was also diagnosed with a hearing impairment.

For his final International Baccalaureate personal project, DiMarco organized a fundraising video game tournament to benefit Proset Autism. When he was younger, he was grateful to learn how to play tennis in an adapted environment from **Philippe Manning** and his team at Proset. DiMarco went on to volunteer with Proset in his high school years and continues to do so today.

The tournament took place on September 14 at Nemesis Video Games Lounge in Point Claire Village. It included a Ninten-

tendo Switch tournament and video gaming, door prizes for all attendees, prizes for the top three finalists, and various items donated by sponsors. DiMarco raised over \$1,600 for Proset Autism (his original goal was \$150!). We hope he received an A+ on his project!

Notebook

Making Montreal more accessible. That is the slogan for the City of Montreal's initiative to make our city more accessible to those with physical disabilities. The development of the Action Plan for Universal Accessibility 2019-2020 is headed by city councillors **Rosannie Filato** and **Eric Allan Caldwell**. The goal is to offer "full participation" for all Montrealers in city life.



The team from the City of Montreal and other organizations conducted their first public consultation on the Action Plan for Universal Accessibility 2019-2020 on November 2 at the St. Leonard library.

The process began in September with consultations with partner organizations. Citizen consultations, scheduled from October 16 to November 30, include an online survey and six fully accessible public consultation meetings on the topic of universal access for people with disabilities.

The first meeting took place at the St. Leonard Library. **Patricia Lattanzio**, city councillor for St. Leonard East and EMSB School Commissioner for St. Leonard, was on hand to welcome participants. "We encourage the citizens of St. Leonard to participate actively in policies and

Consultations focused on five main categories including communication and training, improving the accessibility of municipal sites and public spaces, social cohesion and universally accessible services for citizens, employment and citizen involvement for people with a "functional" limitation. To read a preliminary version of the Action Plan, visit www.makingmtl.ca

on while doing so. The chemistry among the team is palpable.

ILL-Abilities featured several of their own battle creations at the event. The No Limits Concept Dance Battle gave invited local and international dancers the opportunity to dance a mile in someone else's shoes. Dancers spun a wheel labelled with various constraints and adaptive aids, such as a wheelchair, crutches, or a blindfold. They were then challenged to interpret their dance performance using these aids. The Heroes Showcase Battle featured student dancers with disabilities dancing with professional dancers who do not have disabilities. And finally, the audience was treated to an ILL-Abilities theatrical performance which debuted a segment of a brand new theatrical dance piece that

decisions that can affect their daily lives, and so it was only fitting that St. Leonard be the first to host the consultation session on universal accessibility," she said.

Peter Byron and **Rishi Shrestha**

are Industrial Drafting teachers at Rosemount Technology Centre (RTC). This July, they spent four weeks in Nepal on a high-tech humanitarian mission to make inexpensive, highly customizable, 3D-printed hand and arm devices for Nepali people in need.



Saimon Thapa, e-NABLE Nepal volunteer, Peter Byron, e-NABLE Canada founder, Surendra Shrestha, e-NABLE Nepal General Secretary, Khushi S. who is a recipient, and her father, Samod Shrestha, e-NABLE Nepal founding member, Rishi Shrestha, e-NABLE Canada volunteer, Ritesh Rajbhandari, e-NABLE Nepal volunteer. (Photo, Peter Byron)

It's all part of a program called e-NABLE Nepal. Byron founded e-NABLE Canada, which is part of the e-NABLE community, a network of volunteers who use 3D printing to create limbs. Only one in 10 people in need has access to prosthetic or orthotic devices, and access is more acute in low- and middle-income countries.

While 3D hands and arms are not medical devices, they can perform tasks such as holding a water bottle or hairbrush. While the cost of the materials to produce a 3D limb is about \$50.00, they were given for free.

With the partnership of Nepalese businesses and sponsor Future Crunch, and with the generosity of many donors,

these RTC teachers brought thousands of dollars-worth of high-tech equipment with them to set up a permanent 3D printing lab to build devices at no cost.

Since their visit, the e-NABLE Nepal team has built nine devices for recipients, proving that this model of using equipment funded by e-NABLE Canada is viable. Byron and Shrestha could not be prouder to have been a part of this project and have shown the world what can be done with a little effort from many.

On Saturday, November 17, one of the world's most inspiring breakdance (Bboy) crews ILL-Abilities, celebrated its 10th anniversary by throwing a one-of-a-kind jam in collaboration with Les Grands Ballets Canadiens de Montréal (GBCM). It was the first time a HipHop event was held at and with GBCM.

The international crew is led by our friend **Luca 'Lazylegz' Patuelli**, and is comprised of eight professional Bboys who are differently-abled. Together as ILL-Abilities, they have made a remarkable impact through their awe-inspiring performances, workshops, and participation in high-level competitions around the globe. It is a real thrill to watch them dance and cheer each other

the troupe will feature on future tours around the world.

A portion of the proceeds from the event were donated to Les Grands Ballets adapted dance program.

Congratulations to ILL-Abilities on 10 years!



Redouan 'Redo' Ait Chitt (Netherlands), Samuel Henrique 'Samuka' de Silveira Lima (Brazil), Luca 'Lazylegz' Patuelli (Montreal), Sergio 'Checho' Carvajal (Chile), and Jacob 'Kujo' Lyons (USA) are five of the eight-man ILL-Abilities breakdance crew that performed in Montreal on November 17 to celebrate the crew's 10th anniversary. (Photo, ILL-Abilities)



Independent Living Montreal - Vie autonome-Montréal: Converting disabling barriers into enabling environments

By Elaine Cohen

If you ask Deborah Kennard, co-founder and president of Independent Living Montreal (ILM) Vie autonome-Montréal, to make a wish, guaranteed it would entail global autonomy and inclusion for adults with physical and sensory disabilities by empowering them with vital information, workshops and social interaction in a friendly, bilingual milieu. Her mantra is "Everybody has something to contribute to society, regardless of impairment."

Kennard's home office is a hub of digital activity. She is constantly keyed into ILM headquarters at 5555 Westminster Avenue, Suite 404, in Côte Saint-Luc. Kennard conducts research, disseminates information, promotes inclusion and draws support for diverse programs that open doors for people with disabilities.

Fluently bilingual, Kennard works in tandem with ILM Executive Director Sylvain Brouillard, and a bilingual team of volunteer board members and administrators. Close to 90 percent of the administration have physical, sensory or a cross-disability. Their personal experience enables them to impart invaluable advice.

"We want people to fulfil their dreams and passions," Kennard said, alluding to members of their team. Among them is a wheelchair user who integrates wheelchair dancing into her routine; a social worker, who uses a wheelchair, travels and parachutes; a Ph.D. candidate and mother of an eight-month-old baby, who

conducts ILM conferences on childcare for parents with disabilities.

Incorporated in 2001, ILM is one of three in Quebec; other centres operate in St. Jean and Abitibi. The Indipendent Living Canada (ILC) network encompasses 24 centres. Many more operate in the U.S., where the social movement originated over four decades ago, before taking root in Canada.

"We are a non-profit, bilingual, inclusive organization that offers information, so people don't have to contact hundreds of departments," Kennard said. ILM receives support from different levels of government, corporate entities, charitable foundations and other partners. "We also develop ways to raise funds for our needs."

ILM plays a profound role in enabling people with disabilities to take charge of their lives and work with others to produce positive changes. Besides The Bridge, a pre-employment program, ILM provides multi-faceted workshops, online information, an adapted community kitchen, mentored support groups, skill sessions and meetings with dynamic speakers. Recently scheduled topics dealt with preparing curriculum vitae, shopping online, accessing information on higher education and creative outlets. ILM organizes picnics and social gatherings plus collaborated with a group from Concordia University pinpointing places in Montreal without handicap access.

Kennard turns challenges into opportunities. Born with spinal muscle atrophy, she has never walked but remembers being able to assume more of a seated position until later in adolescence. Nevertheless, from a reclining position, she directs a straw-like device with a sole supple finger to do everything from surf the Internet to shop, chat and churn creative projects. She uses a feeding tube to ensure nutrition and breathes with a respirator attached to her neck 24 hours a day. Kennard socializes and looks forward to IL events.

Kennard, now 63, attended the Mackay Centre School, Dawson College and

McGill University. While at McGill, she contracted pancreatitis and had to take time out. "That's when I attended an information meeting in Montreal and met people of all ages and backgrounds with different disabilities," she explained. "We did a feasibility study, organized committees with ILC and contacted hundreds of people to sensitize them to the IL movement. After lots of hard work, we were incorporated."

*For information, contact ILM at 514-288-1177 or visit <https://www.facebook.com/vieautonomemontreal/> **



Deborah Kennard, co-founder and president of Independent Living Montreal – Vie autonome-Montréal, treasures autonomous living.



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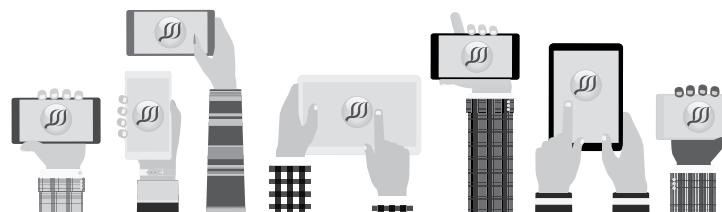
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Pets lend a helping paw at school

By Valentina Basilicata

For Hope, as for nearly 250 children attending **Crestview Elementary** in Laval, August 30 marked the start of a new academic year full of promise. Hope is still the new kid on the block, but her presence has already positively impacted students and staff. In a school where diversity is embraced, Hope fits right in even though she doesn't look, speak or act like a typical classmate. In fact, Hope isn't your typical classmate - Hope is a service dog.

In February 2018, Crestview became the first elementary school within the Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board (SWLSB) to adopt a service dog and incorporate it into the classroom, according to Principal Aimee-Elizabeth Parsons.

"We [the staff] were looking at the rise of students who act out because of anxiety or lack of communication skills," she explains. "There was a clear need to help students regulate their emotions." With traditional methods already in place, staff decided to look outside the box for additional support.

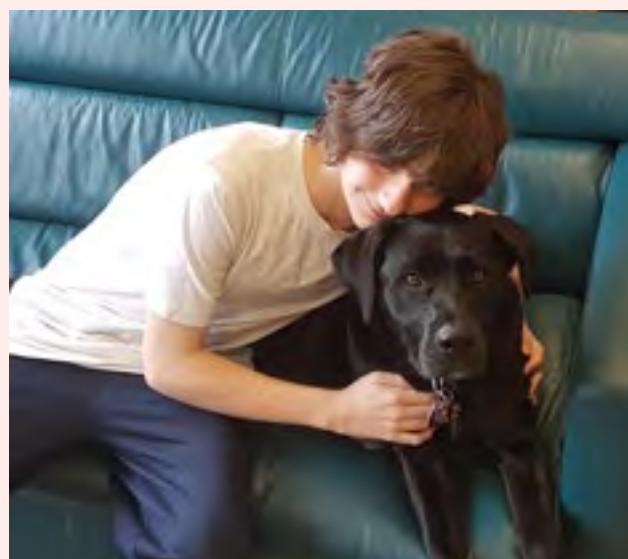
Aside from regular-stream classes, Crestview runs several low-ratio special education classes and has seen a rise in students with various mental health issues.

Diana Antonacci, special education teacher, approached Parsons in October 2017 with the idea of working with Laval's ASISTA Foundation, which provides service dogs for communities dealing with mental health issues or special needs. "It's something that I really, really wanted for the school as a preventative strategy," says Antonacci, who played a key role in making "Project Hope" a reality.

John Angionicolaitis, spokesperson and co-founder of the ASISTA Foundation, explains, "The goal of the dog in the school is to provide a better quality of life at the school. These dogs are trained to tackle certain tasks, such as a crisis situation. At

the end of the day, yes it helps the students, but it also helps the staff. And it puts a smile on everyone's face."

Despite a hefty \$20,000 price tag, the school adopted Hope, a two-year-old



Crestview student bonds with Hope.
(Photo, Diana Antonacci)

black Labrador. The money covers insurance and vaccinations, though most of it goes toward dog and handler instruction. A Crestview special education technician, Michelina Scala, volunteered to be Hope's foster mom.

"The government gives funds for different initiatives in the school, so that was our start up money," says Parsons. She also created a GoFundMe page (<https://ca.gofundme.com/HopeforCrestview>) for the remaining \$15,000. Parsons notes the school is \$5,000 shy of their goal. Donations are still welcome.

Hope and Scala are now officially part of Crestview's crisis intervention team, which aims to de-escalate situations when a student becomes aggressive. Hope soothes and encourages students.

"I had a young boy, a student who is non-verbal, who we could not motivate," Parsons recalls. "Now he will complete three tasks in the morning in order to just go pet the dog." Parsons adds, "Even for children who need to stim [self-stimulation] or make sounds, they seem to just be calm when the dog is there. It's been extraordinary." *

Brigitte Valois, **Lindsay Place High School**'s vice principal, is affectionately known by students as "the VP with the dog." Valois and her family pooch Cricket, a seven-year-old Bernese-Rottweiller mix, work as an administrative duo to create a more serene and friendly environment within this Lester B. Pearson School Board school (LBPSB).

"If dogs are bringing calmness and peace to our homes, the benefits can only be extended when in a school setting," asserts Valois. "My experience with Cricket sends a strong message to the community that we care about our students' well-being just as much as we care about their grades."



Lindsay Place student Brianna Imbeault Zinck shares a hug with Cricket. (Photo, Brigitte Valois)

As school resources diminish and student stress levels rise, Valois believes it's essential to explore effective and out-of-the-box ways to support today's teens.

Although Cricket is not officially a trained service dog, her good-natured, friendly disposition have a calming effect on the kids at Lindsay Place. Cricket visits students in the resource and planning rooms; calms nerves during stressful situations; and even helps special needs students work through anxiety or meltdowns, letting them pet her on her doggie bed or offering a weighted cuddle.

When roaming the halls, Cricket's presence is an icebreaker. Valois says students feel more comfortable shooting the breeze with her, "expediting the building of relationships."

"I have conversations with students who normally would avoid speaking with a vice principal. We get to know each other before issues arise," explains Valois. "It helps me be preventative because they'll let me know if something is bothering them before it becomes a big issue."

What started out as a six-month project while obtaining her Master's degree as vice principal at St. Thomas High School (LBPSB), has evolved into a transformative undertaking lasting more than two years...and counting. According to Valois' findings, her work with Cricket at St. Thomas led to an 80 percent drop in suspensions as well as a significant decrease

in incidents of aggression and referrals to student services. It's not surprising that Cricket was welcome with open arms by administrators and the community when Valois began her new position at Lindsay Place this past summer.

"[Cricket] has a very positive impact on the environment of the school. She loves attention; she'll lie on her back and have [students] rub her belly. She gets a lot of laughs and smiles."

Valois and Cricket have inspired colleagues within the LBPSB; there are three other schools that have shown interest in canine companions.

Valois notes: "Kids connect to animals because they're not judgmental. They treat everyone equally; they don't notice differences. And I think that can be really powerful in schools."

Valentina Basilicata is a freelance journalist, special needs advocate and proud mom. Visit her website at www.vbwriting.com. *



Passez votre téléphone intelligent au suivant

Par Emmanuelle Assor

Conaissez-vous la fondation INCA? Cette fondation a pour mission d'améliorer et d'embellir la vie des personnes touchées par la cécité. Elle offre un soutien communautaire, des renseignements et une représentation nationale aux Canadiens aveugles ou ayant une vision partielle. Fêtant ses 100 ans d'existence cette année, la Fondation a revampé son allure en rafraîchissant son site Web et logo mais aussi en mettant sur pied un programme innovateur, unique en son genre.

Ainsi est né le projet « Rendre l'appareil », un programme de remise à neuf de vieux cellulaires qui seront offerts à des personnes vivant avec une perte de vision. Imaginez donner une deuxième vie à ces millions de téléphones intelligents qui restent dans des tiroirs tous les ans une fois que leurs utilisateurs les ont

remplacés par des modèles plus récents! Grâce au programme « Rendre l'appareil », vous pouvez aider des personnes qui sont aveugles à devenir plus autonomes et même recevoir un reçu à des fins fiscales.

« Saviez-vous que 46 % des Canadiens qui sont aveugles ne possèdent pas de téléphone intelligent car la majorité d'entre eux n'ont pas les moyens de s'en procurer un? », explique John Rafferty, président et chef de la direction d'INCA. Pourtant un téléphone intelligent permet un mode communication facile grâce à des applications comme Siri, une application de commande vocale qui comprend les instructions verbales des utilisateurs et répond à leurs requêtes. C'est une sorte

d'assistante personnelle grâce à laquelle, par exemple, il est possible d'envoyer un texto en le dictant à voix haute ou d'avoir des indications sur la meilleure façon de se rendre à un lieu ou bien de connaître la température qu'il fait dehors. Les téléphones intelligents aident ainsi à réduire les barrières et à accroître l'autonomie des personnes non voyantes.



« Mon téléphone intelligent a changé ma vie. Il m'aide dans plusieurs sphères de mon quotidien. Je m'en sers dans la cuisine, dans mes déplacements, à l'épicerie, pour lire mon courrier, pour lire des livres, envoyer des courriels... Cela me permet d'être comme tout le monde! Je n'ai plus besoin de grosses machines, mon téléphone combine

plusieurs technologies et je peux m'en servir partout, affirme Najla Noori, cliente et employée d'INCA ayant une rétinite pigmentaire. Rendre l'appareil va permettre à un grand nombre de personnes aveugles d'être plus autonomes et de mieux jouir de la vie comme moi. »

Comment faire un don? Toute personne ou entreprise intéressée doit inscrire son téléphone intelligent en ligne sur le site rendrelappareil.ca, se procurer une enveloppe affranchie et faire parvenir son don. Si le cœur vous en dit, vous pouvez déjà passer aux bureaux de la Fondation INCA, situés au 2085, rue Parthenais à Montréal, pour y prendre une enveloppe. Confiante face à l'avenir, Sarah Rouleau, responsable des communications, ajoute qu'« il est certain que dans un avenir proche nous travaillerons à développer des partenariats et à accroître le nombre de points de service avec des enveloppes pour que ce projet continue de changer des vies. »

*Emmanuelle Assor est rédactrice et journaliste pigiste. Elle est aussi la mère d'un merveilleux petit garçon autiste. **

Technologies pour étudiants postsecondaire avec TDA/H : Ne dites pas non avant d'avoir essayé! (Partie 1)

Par Marie-Ève Rioux-Massie, Alex Lussier, Alice Havel, Mary Jorgensen

La réalisation des objectifs académiques des étudiants ayant un TDA/H est améliorée et facilitée par les différentes technologies désormais disponibles. En effet, la littérature indique que ces diverses technologies ont un impact positif. Ajoutant à cela le nombre impressionnant de sites destinés à renseigner sur les technologies susceptibles d'aider à surmonter les difficultés en lien avec le TDA/H en contexte scolaire, on obtient une longue liste d'outils prometteurs. J'ai moi-même dû tester une multitude de logiciels et d'applications et faire des choix, car il est impossible de tout expérimenter. De même, il est irréaliste d'espérer qu'une seule de ces aides technologiques comble l'ensemble des besoins. Heureusement, plusieurs proposent une version d'essai. Lorsque vient le moment de choisir, il est primordial de garder en tête que ce qui est bon pour une personne ne l'est pas nécessairement pour une autre, puisque

les contextes d'apprentissage sont propres à chacun.

L'usage de calendriers et de fonctions de rappel est le conseil le plus fréquent. Personnellement, je trouve qu'avec le temps ces rappels deviennent des distractions et trop souvent je me contente de balayer la notification lorsqu'elle apparaît. Cela concorde avec l'opinion de certains auteurs affirmant que l'abondance de messages reçus sur les appareils électroniques peut être problématique. Les notifications automatiques devraient donc être réduites au maximum afin de donner la chance aux fonctions de rappels d'avoir l'impact escompté.

Les logiciels permettant la lecture à haute voix sont aussi largement recommandés et c'est pour moi, ce qui est le plus bénéfique. Certains de ces logiciels offrent la possibilité de suivre

le texte simultanément et c'est ce qui me permet de demeurer concentrée lors de la lecture, car je peux écouter le contenu tout en ayant un stimulus visuel, cette combinaison augmentant la rétention de l'information et la compréhension. Ces logiciels sont proposés dans une large gamme de prix. Pour moi, ce qui est important est de pouvoir suivre le mot qui est lu, la qualité des voix, ainsi que la facilité à lire des pages Internet et des documents PDF ou Word tout en conservant la mise en forme initiale. Mon expérience personnelle me pousse à dire que les logiciels qui ne peuvent lire le texte dans sa version originale (Word, PDF ou Internet) ne sont pas efficaces pour les étudiants devant faire beaucoup de lecture. Pour toutes ces raisons, je me suis tournée vers Kurzweil 3000.

Le deuxième outil technologique qui m'est indispensable est Audio Notetaker de Sonocent. Il permet l'enregistrement

audio, l'annotation par code de couleur du tracé sonore afin d'y revenir ultérieurement, ainsi que la prise de notes écrites. Les sections audio et les remarques peuvent être associées à chaque page/diapositive. Ce logiciel est abordable et toujours actuel, puisque l'achat d'une seule licence donne accès à toute mise à jour subséquente.

L'usage de ces technologies demande temps et énergie. Les bénéfices de leur emploi doivent donc être supérieurs au coût de leurs adaptations. Pour ma part, il m'a fallu plus d'une année avant de les adopter pour l'ensemble de mes tâches.

*Marie-Ève Rioux-Massie, LL. B. est assistante de recherche pour le Réseau de Recherche Adaptech au Collège Dawson et étudiante à la maîtrise en relations industrielles à l'Université Laval. Pour plus de détails, contactez marie-eve.rioux-massie.1@ulaval.ca. **



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ALink: Moving beyond group homes

By Wendy Singer



Helene Donath, David Birnbaum, Anthony Housefather, Harriet Sugar Miller, and Steven Moses at the ALink meeting at the ADATH on September 6.

ALink is a group of over 30 families who have young adults with cognitive or neurodiverse challenges. They have one main goal: to build an inclusive community where their young adults live, work and play along with the community, not separate and apart from it.

"Segregation is the old paradigm," says Harriet Sugar Miller, who founded ALink along with another parent, Helene Donath. "We're trying to move beyond segregated group homes, activity programs and workshops, to create a more inclusive community. We do that by creating links, or partnerships, among the many wonderful organizations and people that offer support."

The ADATH Israel Synagogue, which provides a home for ALink, is one of those partners. At a meeting on September 6 at the ADATH, ALink members met to discuss "Beyond group homes: What's next?" Invited guests Warren Greenstone, president and chief executive officer of the Miriam Foundation; Anthony Housefather, MP for Mount Royal; and David Birnbaum, MNA for D'Arcy McGee, were on hand to share their knowledge.

Sugar Miller states that the current housing options are limited, and that she's been informed that the waitlist for group homes is a decade or more. "Many of us don't want to stick our kids in government-run group homes. We, and our young adult children, want to live as independently

as possible within the community, with the necessary support," she adds.

Recognizing the significance of the housing problem, Housefather, Birnbaum and Greenstone offered their support to work with ALink.

ALink's housing committee has been doing their homework. They've produced a survey of supportive housing models in North America and are working to create partnerships with organizations that build social housing. They are hoping to work with these organizations to provide some spaces and support for their young adults.

They have also visited Les Habitations Rêvanous in Ahuntsic, a mixed housing apartment building that combines autonomous seniors with people who have various challenges. "Parents have worked hard for years to make Rêvanous a reality, and we're impressed by what they've built," states Sugar Miller.

Currently, Rêvanous has a waitlist of approximately 180 people with cognitive disabilities, indicating the real need for housing.

ALink families are preparing to move forward and welcome new families to join them. "In addition to housing, we've got lots of work to do on creating inclusive work opportunities for our young adults and on building a lifelong life skills training program to support them," adds Sugar Miller. "We look forward to partnering with others in our community to make Montreal a model for inclusion."

If you have a young adult with neurodiverse challenges and would like to learn more or get involved, contact ALink member Rissa Mechaly at rissam@videotron.ca. To learn more about Les Habitations Rêvanous, visit <http://revanous.org/les-habitations-revanous>. *

Metta Terre - A way of living

By Randy Pinsky

Turning 20 is usually an exciting time for all involved, brimming with endless possibilities. But for parents of young adults with disabilities, the future is met with much more trepidation and uncertainty: Will they find gainful employment willing to accommodate their needs? Who will advocate for them once their guardians are no longer capable of doing so? In other words; what's next?

In conversing with a friend whose adult son has special needs, Joan Gottman listened to the options and didn't like what she heard. Determined to ensure that her son would have an engaging and happy future, Gottman proposed her vision to a small group of similarly concerned parents. Together, they launched Metta Terre, a collective living center to be created in rural Rigaud.

But what sort of initiative would this be? In reviewing supported housing options, Gottman came across the collective Camphill model. Half of the members have developmental challenges, and all engage in farm-to-table entrepreneurial ventures. This provides them with critical life skills for independent living such as autonomy and teamwork, while enabling for a self-sustaining community that also contributes to the surrounding economy.

Cleverly combining the Sanskrit words of love (metta) with earth (terra), the initiative is guided by the belief that all can make their mark. It is inspired by philosopher Rudolf Steiner's belief that, "Our highest endeavor must be to develop free human beings who are able of themselves to impart purpose and direction to their lives."

More than simply a housing centre for adults with disabilities, Gottman reinforces that Metta Terre is a way of life. Instead of professed 'experts' helping disabled clients, the emphasis is on collaborative partnerships where all contribute to the running of the community.

Metta Terre would also be an idyllic venue for those seeking an opportunity to live

in a meaningful and ecologically-responsible manner.

Erika Tencer, mother of a 22-year old daughter with Down syndrome, is an enthusiastic supporter. A recreational therapist by trade, her family anticipates moving to the centre once it's established.

Tencer feels that the uniqueness of the initiative is the emphasis on valuing the participants for what they bring, rather than society's myopic focus on what they lack. The idea is to see beyond conventional understandings of disability and perceive the inherent value those with



Metta Terre beach and barbecue get-together.
(Photo, Catherine Garin)

special needs can contribute. "When it is finished, it will be beyond wonderful," said Tencer.

Metta Terre's team believes "It is time to re-examine some of our assumptions about what is the best way to move forward" in the field of disability, particularly concerning "people's rightful desire to belong."

Such a sentiment was best expressed by Gottman's son Alex: "I want to actively work towards making our world a more loving place for us all."

For information, contact Joan Gottman or Catherine Garin at mettaterre@gmail.com. *



Montreal clinics offer employment opportunities for people with special needs

By Cindy Davis

Sam Benamron started out as a sole-practitioner occupational therapist 15 years ago, but always believed in giving back to his community. As his business grew, he was dedicated to incorporating this mentality into his workplace and started by donating pyjamas to children in battered women shelters, providing educational toys to at-risk youth, and being the title sponsor for I Can Dream Theatre's first gala - an organization with which he grew a strong attachment.

Even then, Benamron felt that there was more he could do. "Everyone who knows me knows that I like to donate, but I don't like to just write a cheque," says Benamron. "You have to put in the work if you really want to feel good about something. I've worked hard to get where I'm at and I'm a firm believer that you don't just give, you do."

Two years ago, as the owner and operator of seven occupational therapy and physiotherapy clinics across Montreal, and with a staff of approximately 50, Benamron decided to create two general work positions at his Verdun clinic, Physio Verdun, specifically for individuals with special needs, and

posted the jobs at I Can Dream Theatre. After an interview process, Ainslie Macdonald and Paul Fernandes were hired. Lindsay Oksenberg was hired one year later at Benamron's Montreal North Clinic, Phyio-Expert. In both locations he appointed staff members to be resource people in charge - in Verdun, Mathilde Montambault, a physiotherapist, and in Montreal North, Catherine Bernard, an occupational therapist. The results have been overwhelmingly positive for all.

"I feel really included and everyone is really nice here," says Macdonald. "I have a lot of tasks and it keeps me busy. Whenever I come in it makes me feel happy that I have a job and that I feel included in the workforce, too. I've had other stages before, but they were not as inclusive as here."

A positive shift in morale in the workforce and among patients has been noted by all supervisors. "Everyone is happier when she is there," says Bernard (referring to Oksenberg who works with her at Physio-Expert). "It's so rewarding. I feel like it has made me a better person."

Macdonald, Fernandes and Oksenberg are treated like any other employee and

have their own office space set up which they like to personalize. Their tasks include folding and sorting laundry, cleaning, general office duties and a host of other duties. Their supervisors accommodate their specific needs and give them jobs to suit their strengths. "At first, it was a way to give back," says Benamron. "Today, we need them. When they are not here, we feel it. We notice it."

Benamron is now passionate about inclusion in the workplace, and says that even though there has been a learning curve, as with any employee, you have to be patient and the reward will pay off. He notes that Macdonald, Fernandes and Oksenberg are always on time, eager to work, and are appreciative.

Oksenberg says that growing up, she dreamed of joining the workforce and



Sam Benamron hopes to encourage other employers to hire individuals with special needs. From the left: Catherine Bernard, Mathilde Montambault, Lindsay Oksenberg, Paul Fernandes, Ainslie Macdonald, and Sam Benamron.

is grateful for this opportunity. "You know, when people find out that you are different or you have special needs they are not always open. They are nervous," she says. "But they should give it a try because special needs people - they bring a lot of happiness. They make the world better. Everyone deserves a chance." *

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Au Croissant 21 owner's mission: Hire those with disabilities

By Martin C. Barry

Bertin Savard has worn many hats over the years. Since leaving his home in Quebec's Saguenay region, he's been an actor, scriptwriter, event organizer – even a massage therapist. His latest calling is that of a baker/café owner in Rigaud just west of Montreal, where his shop, Au Croissant 21, distinguishes itself by hiring persons with disabilities. The goal is to empower them.

Savard – who has eked out a living as an actor, appearing in the Quebec TV sitcom *Les Bougon* – strongly believes in the connectedness of all people.

In setting up Au Croissant 21, he wanted an important part of the café's mission to be to raise awareness of the abilities of individuals we often end up labelling

disabled. First to be hired at Au Croissant 21 was Savard's 24-year-old son, Jasmin, who has Down syndrome (DS). Au Croissant 21 was a father's way of creating employment for his son.

The name of the café is derived from a reference to DS, which is also known as trisomy 21. People with DS have three of chromosome 21 instead of the typical two.

"Whenever we come into contact with a person with Down syndrome or who is intellectually handicapped or disabled, it changes our outlook – it

obliges us to look at ourselves," Savard said in an interview with *Inspirations*. "When we see someone handicapped who is working, it makes us redefine ourselves. People find it courageous. It brings out their compassion."

In addition to employing Jasmin, Au Croissant 21 has also hired a cashier who



Au Croissant 21 owner Bertin Savard with his son, Jasmin, at the front entrance of their establishment in Rigaud, Quebec.

has cerebral palsy. Anaïs Sabourin works shifts on weekends. Open since last May, Au Croissant 21 has already garnered a following of fans and supporters, not only from the Montreal region, but also from nearby eastern Ontario.

Savard noted not every member of his staff has special needs. Nevertheless, as long as the business is doing well enough financially, he intends to hire people that do.

To that end, the layout at Au Croissant 21 has been modified somewhat to accommodate the disabled. For example, a ramp at the front entrance guarantees that wheelchairs have easy access.

*Au Croissant 21 is located at 133-A Saint-Pierre St. in Rigaud. For information, visit aucroissant21.com or phone 514-442-9969. **



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"When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become a wiser, more inclusive, and better organization."



Bus driver training will provide a smoother ride for people with autism

By Nick Katalifos

For a large percentage of families, the daily ritual of hugging a child and watching him or her climb the steps into a school bus is considered a normal part of the day, representing the very real necessity of a service that so many parents rely on. While there are certainly a multitude of factors involved in the organization and daily operation of transportation services for all students, children living with autism often experience a very different set of challenges in their daily commutes to school and back.

The challenges include transitions, noise levels and routes, to name a few. To combat these issues, the team at the Giant Steps School and Resource Centre is developing a special training tool for school bus drivers. Inspired by their previous creation of a video training se-

ries for police and other first responders, these videos aim to teach how to better understand and support individuals with autism.

Supported by a generous grant from corporate leader La Capitale, Giant Steps Resource Centre coordinator Marla Cable explained that: "Knowledge is power, and we hope this training program will give that to school bus drivers so that they better understand the behaviours of people with autism, their challenges and needs."

According to Cable, the school bus driver training program will consist of a "one

pager" of key tips, strategies and information on how to help their passengers with autism have a positive experience on the bus. "We recognize that what happens at home and school can have an impact on the students' ride on the bus and by the same token, what happens in the bus can have an impact at school and home. Hence the importance that we work together to support our students."

The video training tool, filmed by project partner Marrone Films, will be available free of charge for download on the



Giant Steps students take their daily ride on the school bus.
(Photo, Ross White)

Giant Steps website in January 2019. School bus companies are encouraged to use it to sensitize their staff and help them better understand autism, which affects one in 68 children. It will clearly define the disorder, and provide assistance to the drivers in their daily work, creating a more supportive environment for the students.

While researching this project, Cable listened to concerns from staff, parents, students and autistic adults in order to ensure that all stakeholders' points of view were considered. It was equally important to the video developers to include autistic individuals in the filming process. Five students from Giant Steps School were featured in the video, and needless to say, they were very excited to play such an important role.

For information, visit
www.giantstepsmontreal.com.

Nick Katalifos is the principal of Wagar Adult Education Centre, chairman of the Giant Steps School and Resource Centre, and special advisor to *Inspirations*. *



Your IEP does not count at CEGEP: An official diagnosis is needed to access accommodations

By Jay Jones-Doyle

High school can be challenging for most - disabled or not. It is a time of intense change, experimentation, and for those with disabilities it may be the period where they find accommodation to help them achieve academically. These accommodations become ingrained and integral parts of their toolkit for success, and as such students can become reliant on access to them. When they graduate and gear up for CEGEP they assume that they will be afforded, at minimum, the same accommodations as they had in high school. Sadly, this is not always the case. Here is an overview of why, and why now.

In CEGEP, students *must* have an official diagnosis to be eligible to receive ser-

vices from the Accessibility Centre (or whatever name is given to the centre that provides services to students with disabilities at a particular CEGEP). Technically this has always been the case, but in the past many exceptions were made. A critical point here is that an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) is not an official diagnosis. Since official diagnoses can require many steps and sometimes years to acquire (especially in the public system), many schools take the initiative to provide students with IEPs based on observed need. These are wonderful, as they provide students with the support they need without needing to suffer through years of academic inequality while waiting for a piece of paper. The problem is that students and their parents are not always made aware that these accommodations are unofficial, and that they are likely to be refused services in CEGEP.

In talking with Susie Wileman, a psychologist working in Dawson's AccessAbility Centre, it has become apparent that the old leniencies are no longer being offered. Without an official diagnosis, students will be refused services even when the need is apparent. It has become a matter of bureaucracy - funding allocations for the access centres are now tied directly to the number of registered students. Students can only be "officially registered" by presenting their official diagnosis paperwork, whereas before the reporting was more loosely tied to how many students were using their services. By offering services to individuals, without official diagnoses, the Centres would have to do so without funding from the government - something they are no longer willing to do.

The take-home message: If you are a high school student receiving accommo-

dations without an official diagnosis you should start the process of getting that diagnosis as early as possible. Wait times in the public system, especially for neurological disorders, learning disabilities, etc. can be extremely long (two to three years). If you don't have your diagnosis in time for the start of CEGEP you will likely not be able to access the accommodations that helped you achieve your success to date.

Jay Jones-Doyle is the co-founder and president of Legal Lighthouse Inc., the president of Confidence Driven Coaching, the CFO of the Centre for International Sustainable Development Law, and worked at the UN's Business and Biodiversity program. He holds two advanced degrees, is a motivational speaker, has cerebral palsy, and is the proud father of a 13-year-old son. *



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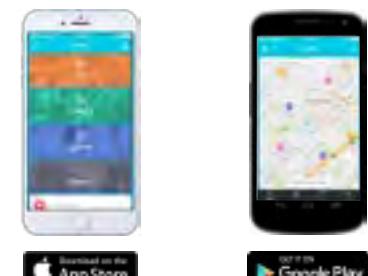
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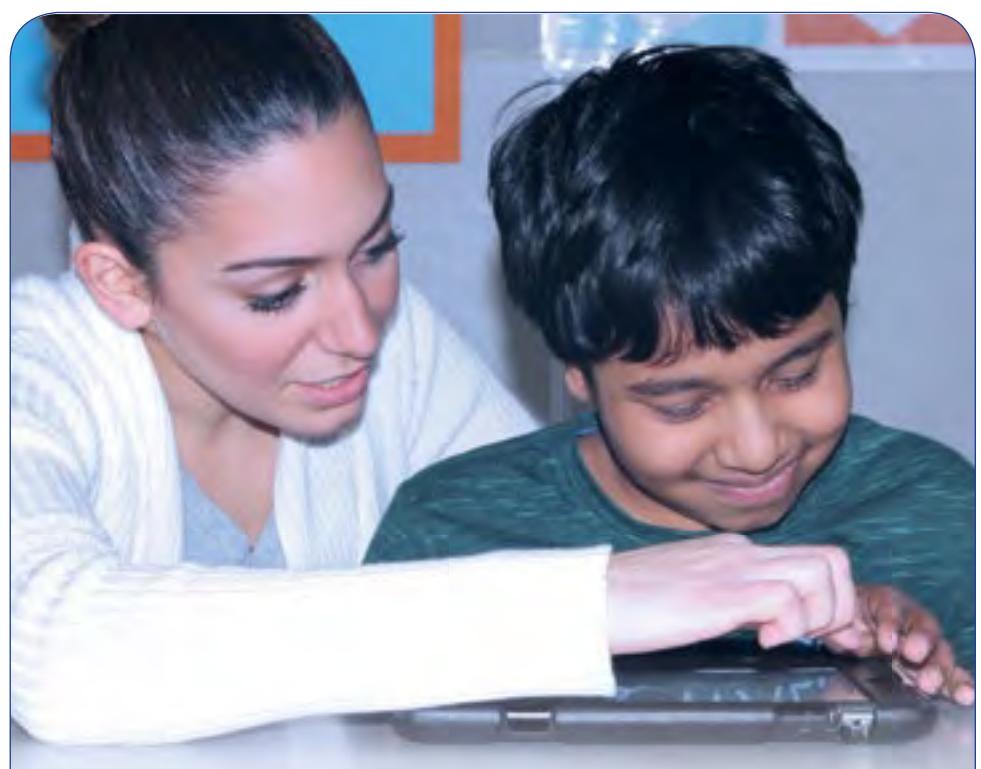
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▶ Centre of Excellence Newsletter

The newsletter includes information for teachers around specific speech and language issues, helpful hints for classroom management and professional development opportunities.

▶ Workshops and Conferences

We provide workshops and conferences on a variety of topics relating to Speech and Language Development and evidence-based strategies.

Centre of Excellence Co-Coordinators

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Read with your ears!

New apps that allow students different (and amazing) options for text-to-speech

By Andrea Prupas and Olivia Colalillo

Text-to-speech just keeps getting better and better. From increased availability (i.e. on mobile devices) to huge improvements in text-to-speech voices, we are thrilled to see our students succeed in and out of the classroom with this assistive technology tool.

"Reading with your ears" can be an excellent strategy for students who need an alternate format to

read text. Listening to a text (ideally while following along with highlighted text) can be an option for some students

tts process



who demonstrate strengths in listening comprehension.

Here are two new, free apps that can really make a difference for students who use text-to-speech:

Office Lens: Office Lens is an OCR (optical character recognition) app that can scan a paper document, then convert it into a digital and accessible format (that can be used with text-to-speech). However, there is a feature that allows students to read the document right away within

the mobile device! Simply take a picture, click on the "immersive reader" option within the app, then listen to your scanned document read out loud. In addition, there is the option to export your document to a cloud-based

platform, to be read with text-to-speech on a laptop or Chromebook. (Android, iOS)

Seeing AI: By "turning the visual world into an audible experience," this app is truly amazing. Originally designed for individuals with visual impairment, it allows the user to use their mobile device as a "narrator." Point your mobile device at an object, person, scene, a piece of text, or even currency, and it will identify it for you! For students with learning or reading disabilities, this app has many possibilities. Without even taking a photo, the app will read both text and handwritten text out loud to the student. Simply hover over the text and it magically reads to you. (Android, iOS)

Are you using an amazing assistive technology app? Let us know. You can contact us at <https://at-emsb.org/>

Andrea Prupas and Olivia Colalillo are assistive technology consultants at the English Montreal School Board, where they support the EMSB community with assistive technologies for teaching and learning. *

Parenting to promote good mental health: The why and how

By Janet Silverstone Perlis

Promoting good mental health in youth, a hot new topic, has implications for both home and school. The World Health Organization (WHO) has emphasized that mental health is an integral part of good general health. Key factors include flexibility, resilience, building and maintaining relationships, developing self-confidence, and establishing a good work/life balance. Promoting good mental health in one's child or adolescent lays the foundation for developing skills to learn how to cope with life's normal ups and downs, make appropriate decisions, resist pressure to engage in negative behaviours as well as maximize academic success.

The building blocks to help parents support good mental health in their children include the following:

1 Mind-body connection: You cannot have a healthy mind without having a healthy body. By ensuring your child eats balanced, nutritious meals (including a good breakfast), exercises regularly, and gets enough sleep, you are not only taking care of your child's physical health but also their mental health. It is important to help your child learn how to cope when they are upset, with self-regulation strategies like breathing techniques, engaging in quiet activities, listening to music, and/or going for a walk.

2 Guidance and discipline: Children of all ages need parents to provide guidance, predictability, structure, and routine to help them feel safe and secure. Decide on and enforce clear rules and limits appropriate for your child's age and stage. It is important that your child understands what you expect and what the outcome will be if they don't follow the rules.

3 Build strong, caring relationships: Children need to feel loved unconditionally, listened to, and respected. They need to trust that you will support them no matter what. They need to know that how you feel about them is not dependent on external factors such as how they are doing in school or what they look like.

4 Promote self-esteem: Children benefit by being praised but it is important that it is genuine. Over-praising dilutes the benefit as their true efforts and successes won't be highlighted. Help them become aware of their strengths and discover what they are good at. Your child also needs to know that making mistakes is a normal part of growing up. Never humiliate or put down your child for not succeeding. You can talk about your own successes and failures and what you've learned by not being the best at something.

5 Challenge: Expose your child to opportunities to realistically challenge themselves. When they try new things, let them know how proud you are of their efforts. Remind them that learning new skills takes time and practice, and that no one can master everything. When they encounter an issue, help them learn how to problem-solve by generating possible solutions without you being the one to take over the process.

Even when you apply your best parenting skills, your child may experience problems.

If you feel additional help is necessary, contact your child's pediatrician or the school team to be directed to the appropriate resources.

Janet Silverstone Perlis M.Ed., is a school psychologist at the English Montreal School Board and part of its Mental Health Resource Centre. *



Sam Roberts Band drummer overcomes visual impairment to achieve drumming fame

By Martin C. Barry

From time to time, we hear a story of courage involving a person who has been able to overcome a disability to make a success of his or her life. Less often do we hear about someone who has been able to deal with a challenge while achieving a large degree of fame, recognition and respect from others.

For followers of the Canadian rock music scene, Josh Trager, 37, is well known as the drummer in the platinum record-setting Sam Roberts Band. An alumnus and scholarship recipient of the Berklee College of Music in Boston, Trager is considered to be one of Canada's most prominent drummers.

Prior to joining the Sam Roberts Band in 2005, he performed at the Montreal International Jazz Festival and Montreal Drum Fest, and was part of the Yamaha Rising Star showcase (1999). He was a member of Mahogany Rush from 2001-2005, having been personally selected, at the age of 20, by guitar legend Frank Marino.

Born and raised in Côte Saint-Luc, Trager also appeared on numerous stages and in recordings with many great artists, including members of Barenaked Ladies, the legendary Jack Bruce of Cream, Uli Roth of the Scorpions, James Iha of the Smashing Pumpkins and Jonas.

What's perhaps less known about Trager is that from childhood onwards he's suffered from low vision caused by an eye condition known as nystagmus. According to the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, there is a popular misconception of blindness as complete visual darkness. However, an eye problem like nystagmus, affecting how the eyes move and coordinate, interferes with the lives

of those affected by reducing vision and depth perception. The condition, which can be acquired in infancy or later in life, causes one or both eyes to move involuntarily.

Although its effects can vary from person to person, in all cases of nystagmus vision will be blurred. Vision fluctuates during the day and is likely to be affected by emotional and physical factors. Trager's vision comes in at 20/100, compared to the ideal which is often referred to as 20/20. The first number refers to the distance in feet from the testing chart and the second to the size of the letters. 20/100 means you must be as close as 20 feet to see what a person with normal vision can see at 100 feet, according to the American Foundation for the Blind.

"I just sort of always took it for granted while growing up," Trager says about the impact nystagmus had on him from early on. "I've had it my whole life, but you become more aware of it as you age."

Trager recalls that as a small child he sometimes would find himself becoming disoriented while in a store with his parents: if they walked just a short distance away from him down the aisle, he would become upset because his low vision prevented him from being able to see them.

Although at first he loved taking part in sports, his eye problem cut short his ability to participate. "I had all the will in the world and the zeal to pursue sports," he says. "But then once I was on the field with the other kids, I started to feel that my low vision was affecting my performance and my self-esteem."

Trager's eye problem, which prevented him from reading blackboards at a dis-



"I just sort of always took it for granted while growing up," Josh Trager says of his nystagmus eye condition, which hasn't stopped him from becoming an accomplished musical professional. (Photo, Josh Trager)

tance properly, caused him to struggle in school. "I fell behind and again it had a pretty drastic effect on my self esteem," he says. This was largely resolved following a move to a private school where the classes were smaller and he received more attention from teachers. However, to this day he wears thick eyeglasses to correct his vision as much as possible.

Inspired by the music of Guns N' Roses, Trager started playing drums at age 11. "Pretty much from that moment on it didn't take me long to figure out that this was what I wanted to do with my life – to try to become the best drummer and

the best musician I could possibly become," he says.

As a student at Montreal's Centennial Academy, which had an extensive music program, Josh truly caught the drumming bug, following which he did post-secondary studies at Berklee.

Today, Trager looks back on everything and concludes that he drew valuable lessons from his life experiences. "Regardless of the struggles, you should never let your handicap or impairment be a barrier to your aspirations and dreams," he says. *

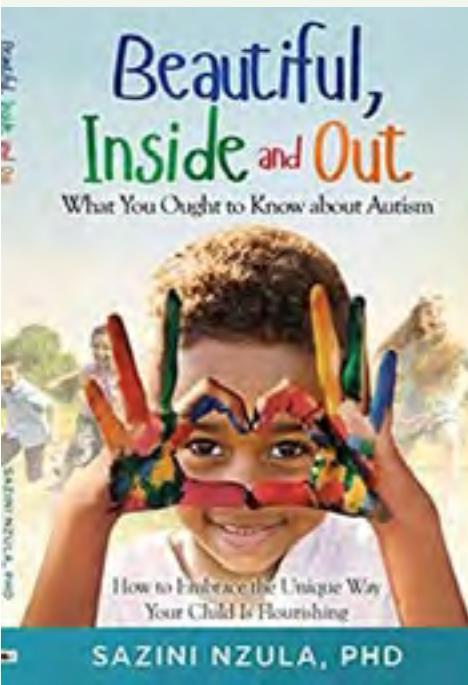


On behalf of everyone at I Can Dream Theatre, we would like to salute *Inspirations* on their 10th anniversary.

Thank you for continuing to be a leader in the special needs community, and for being a much needed voice for this beautiful population.

**THANK YOU
MERCI**

Inspirational book review



A professional may advise a patient or client but when the situation hits home, they personally know how it feels. Dr. Sazini Nzula, an accomplished author, consultant, speaker, and scientist with a PhD in medical microbiology has a lot to be proud of but nothing surpasses the pride she takes in her children's achievements.



What's new with Make it Matter?

By Deborah Athanasopoulos

Make it Matter (MIM) is a fundraising platform that aims to support educational projects that are in need of financial support. In addition to supporting *Inspirations'* Fun For All Fair, last year, MIM supported the Steven Atme project (which you can read about in Atme's column on page 32 of this edition). We raised \$2,000 that enabled Atme to bring his passion for music and theatre to the classroom at Elizabeth Ballantyne Elementary School. Atme's program gave students with special and behavioural needs the opportunity to explore and discover the arts.

This school year, MIM is funding the "Fun 15 With Friends" initiative at Edward Murphy Elementary School, which helps build friendships between students with autism and their peers during recess

"Ethan and Jayden have taught me more about autism, diversity, and life than any knowledge I gained from experts, books and research articles combined," she writes in *Beautiful, Inside and Out: What You Ought to Know about Autism and How to Embrace the Unique Way Your Child Is Flourishing*.

The author takes readers on her journey through life focusing on her sons, both diagnosed with autism. Nzula grew up in Zimbabwe and compares it to many places, where autism awareness is limited. Meanwhile, she is doing her best to sensitize everyone and promote universal progress.

Parents will appreciate Nzula's no-nonsense stance. As a professional and a parent of children with autism, she real-

izes the importance of early intervention. Therefore, she advises parents to be proactive.

Chapter 1 is titled "In the Eye of the Autism Diagnosis Storm" and every parent of a child with special needs, regardless of the condition, can relate to the fear, guilt, anger, grief and denial path Nzula describes. She discusses the struggles, sharing how some people's reactions affected her social life.

However, Nzula urges parents to "move on beyond the label." She refers to clients and experts in the field and compliments their efforts to maximize a child's potential. When it comes to their children, parents know best, Nzula observes, adding not to let anyone dampen your self-esteem. A proponent of "manage stress

before it manages you," she says parents must take time out for themselves. Pursue something enjoyable and the family unit will benefit from the parent's demeanour.

In addition to addressing traditional interventions, the author notes the explosion of innovative interventions, such as biomedical and interest-led therapies. Readers will glean pointers on finding therapists. The soft cover, reader-friendly book fits in a purse but it covers a lot of territory. A case in point is a section reminding parents to prepare for their child's lifelong needs by attending to financial and estate planning.

For information, visit www.drsazini.com or connect@drszini.com. *

Celebrating at the Centre of Dreams and Hopes

Inspirations visited the Centre of Dreams and Hopes in Montreal North to honour their caregiver team with the Dynamic Funds Caregiver of Inspiration 2018 award. The team was acknowledged by fellow staff members and clients, who were eager to celebrate this team. Caregivers received Cinémas Guzzo movie passes, and a painting from The Big Blue Hug. If you have a Caregiver or Caregiver Team of Inspiration that you would like to nominate, let us know at cindyinspirations@gmail.com.



Cristina Sorrentino, Dina Mohamed, Maria Lopez Vasquez, Eleni Lacopo, and Angie Scarola accept their award at the Centre of Dreams and Hopes.



Students learn through virtual reality at Hampstead Elementary School

By Cindy Davis

"Please Miss Danna, can we do this again?" plead the students in Danna Dworkind's combined 5th and 6th grade class at Hampstead Elementary School after the lesson. Since last year, Dworkind has been using various modes of technology to increase her students' language arts skills.

Her class is mixed with children with various special needs and learning disabilities along with neurotypical kids - all who are able to read at the highest level in the school. Dworkind has always had a strong interest in technology and finds it a useful tool in engaging the children. She, along with several colleagues, attended a conference on educational technology in 2016, after which she was determined to bring tech into her own classroom.

"It doesn't matter if you are gifted and talented, if you are disabled, or if you don't even have an interest in English. Every single student gets engaged when they are on a piece of technology and they know how to use it," says Dworkind.

On the day I visited Dworkind's classroom, students were using a Google Expedition kit owned by the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) and loaned out to schools upon request. The kits consist of goggles and smart phones, and various educational apps can be used to place students in virtual scenarios. In one example, students were placed in a situation and asked to distinguish the theme of the story, and then write their own stories based on the same theme. Students were paired up in another activity, with one partner depicting the setting to the oth-

er by using only descriptive words. The goal, says Dworkind, is to have students recreate the feelings they experience when wearing the goggles through their writing. "Virtual reality takes the idea of a mind movie to the next level," she says. "We always say to our students don't just tell; show and create a mind movie for the reader."

Dworkind has also used Minecraft, video green screens and augmented reality with her students, all which have been very well received.

"It gives us more imagination and helps us describe scenes more. We can see things all around us so it's much more descriptive," says student Maya Hertsman. "I like using the goggles for seeing scenes of other places in

the world – London, Japan, Africa," adds her classmate Nathan Leitner. "It's exciting to know that these places are actually real. You wonder what's going on in their lives."

These days, it's exciting to see what's going on in the classrooms. *



Students in Danna Dworkind's class at Hampstead Elementary School are using virtual reality goggles to enhance their creative writing skills.

Not all gains on assets are taxed. Your principal residence (basically your house) could be sold tax free, but remember to file the proper forms with the tax authorities. Most gains from investments are taxed as capital gains but there are some special cases. You need to know the tax cost in order to calculate the gain.

Prior to 1972 (Valuation-day; V-day), there was no capital gains tax in Canada; the increase was tax free. After 1971, the increase in value became taxable. These gains are added to the annual income based upon the taxable inclusion rate in effect in the year of the sale. Currently the gain is taxed at 50 percent of the gain.

In 1994, the Capital Gains Election (form T664) allowed the taxpayer to increase the tax cost of elected asset(s) [with associated criteria] to minimize income tax upon its actual sale.

To calculate the actual capital gain upon disposition, you need to:

Capital gains: Don't overpay!

By Harold Akerman

- Obtain documentation of the original cost and subsequent changes to the cost.
- Verify if it was owned in 1971 and if other 1971 assets were sold previously.
- Obtain the 1994 tax return and verify if the 1994 election was made.
- Contact CRA (1-800-959-8281), and request a full detailed election form.
- Verify if marketable securities were purchased with the current broker or transferred to the current broker at original cost or market value at the date of transfer.
- Determine if a deceased spouse transferred assets to the surviving spouse at cost or somewhere between cost and market value at the time of death.

In our tax planning, capital gains must be considered to minimize overall tax liabilities; this becomes especially important when planning for loved ones with special needs.

Harold Akerman is a practicing public accountant with over 25

years of experience. He presents on subjects related to personal tax and disability-related topics. Contact Harold at haroldcpaca@gmail.com or 514-979-8752. *

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We support creativity and a spirit of inquiry • *Appuyer la créativité et l'esprit de recherche.*

Integrity • Intégrité

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Respect • Respect

We foster a respectful, nurturing and safe environment • *Favoriser un environnement respectueux, stimulant et sécuritaire.*



Parents seek services for children aged out of youth sector

By Joanne Charron

tion, and when they become adults...we come to a cliff.

Parents like me are at a place now where our children have aged out of the youth sector, with limited services, housing and programs to receive them. We have worked all these years to ready them and then nothing.

They have nowhere to go. Parents have to decide what is next. Does one parent quit their job to stay home with their son or daughter? Or, if you are a single parent, do you go on welfare or place your child on lengthy waiting lists? Or, do you institutionalize them or place them in seniors' residences?

Are these the only options open to us after so many years of arduous work and devotion?

I am at the edge of that cliff, and it is heartbreaking and daunting, but we are resilient, resourceful and we are not prepared to accept that these are our only options. Again, we find ourselves creating the solutions and paving the way for those behind us.

I am hopeful that we can create what we need. Again, we are the advocates, the lobbyists, the innovators. And we have become very good at it.

It is time that there is a change in how we as a country care for our most vulnerable, and that we create services and quality of life which is standard in Canada and woven into our social fabric.

We do not need to reinvent the wheel but model best practices from around the world thus alleviating the weight on

families, those affected with disabilities, and on society.

This is the only way to ensure the futures of our most vulnerable.

At the EMSB we have started analyzing this, in order to prepare for our children's transitions from both elementary to secondary, and from the youth sector to adult sector. This will lead to programs that cater to our children at all stages of their lives. The programs keep growing in order to accommodate this increasing population.

Maybe one day we will have centres for our most vulnerable, where they can live and receive stimulating programs and be among their peers. Private in the public interest centres is my dream, and I believe it is the future.

Keep driving! I'll see you on the road.

*Joanne Charron is a special advisor to Inspirations. **

We have come a long way but there is still a lot of road ahead. From childhood to adulthood your commitment never stops. You navigate the system, and sometimes blindly, but have faith that you're on the right road and that you are driving straight ahead and through all the obstacles.

Just when you think you are comfortable another transition comes, then another, then another.

We are actually creating the road ahead without realizing it. We are the first generation of parents and caregivers keeping our children at home and creating a demand for services. When they are of school age it creates a demand in educa-

MUTSUMI TAKAHASHI & PAUL KARWATSKY

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South Shore mom motivates others at S.Au.S.

By Barry Morgan

It's been nine years since Audrey Burt founded S.Au.S. - Soutien Autism(e) Support, a charitable organization that works very hard to help families affected by autism.

"There's only one source of my inspiration, and that's Keyan," Burt told *Inspirations*. Keyan Saha is her teenaged son, who has autism; he's non-verbal and needs daily support.

"I only wanted one thing; that was to be a mother," Burt said. "And I am. That's my job. I do this, not only for my son with autism, but my daughter who doesn't have autism."

Now 15 years old, Keyan was 18 months old when his family received the diagnosis. Burt and her family's sto-



Audrey Burt's son Keyan Saha at S.Au.S.
(Photo, Audrey Burt)

ry involves a roller-coaster of emotions and frustration. "You get your diagnosis and they send you on your merry way," Burt said. "They pretty much tell you in the office that 'your child has autism' and you're just left to pick up the pieces. Hence, this is why I do the work that I do."

Burt wanted to create a space where her son, and others with autism, can be active and socialize. "Because Keyan is severely autistic, there was no place for him. I would bring my daughter to her dance class and then Keyan was forced to stay home. And I said 'this is not the way a family is. My children should have equal opportunity, especially as young children.'"

S.Au.S. prides itself on being a small organization with a big heart. A handful of volunteers pitch in. Located at 9 Montcalm Blvd. North in South Shore Candioc, it creates and provides leisure programs for children on the autism spectrum. "It's just the pleasure of a child having fun," Burt said.

Among the programs S.Au.S. offers are soccer, dance and music therapy. Prices vary. There are also programs that involve a child and their family; free swim and free play for which there is no charge.

"What's really amazing about that formula," Burt said, "is that you have the child with autism, who has an activity, who brings his or her sibling (sometimes it's hard for them to connect), these siblings then see they're not the only family like that, that there's other families like them. And on top of it, the parents exchange information. So it's very multi-layered." Friends and other family are welcome, as well.

S.Au.S. also has a summer day camp for teenagers with autism, having just completed its third year. And there's a Teen Club that meets once a month on Fridays from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m., offering a chance to hang out and play games or watch movies.

S.Au.S. is working on a five-year plan to build a day centre for those 21 and over. "That's my son's future," Burt said, "That's the rest of his life."

Burt's group hosted a gala casino night on November 17 at the community centre in Candioc. Their goal was to raise \$75,000.

It's about helping kids on the autism spectrum enjoy a better quality of life.

For information, visit www.s-au-s.org. *



'Made It Matter' at Elizabeth Ballantyne

By Steven Atme

MIM would raise the funds, and I would do the teaching!

Last February, the project began. I ran sessions every Monday for 15 students that were recommended by Michael Brown, EB principal, along with the school's behavioural technicians and integration aides. It was a big change for me - going from assistant to teacher, and from private piano lessons to group classes.

I was nervous. It took a couple of weeks to adapt, but then I got used to it. I taught three groups of five. Getting to know students inspired me to create fun activities as a group or sometimes privately. Many of the students were gifted in acting, music and dancing. Some started fresh and learned new skills.

We created games with everyone's cooperation by sharing ideas and then

showcased the students' talents. When some students had rough moments, I counselled them. Afterwards, students expressed emotions through their passions.

I witnessed major progress by the time June rolled around. The students felt that they did something meaningful and made it matter. I'll never forget when the students' parents were at EB and witnessed their children's talents. It changed each child's life. They were so proud and had tears of joy.

I had so much fun working at the school with great students and staff. It was a wonderful experience for me to learn about running classes and one day I will do it again.

This is EB's "Music Guy" and "Mr. Bean" saying thank you to everyone at EB,



Steven Atme with students at Elizabeth Ballantyne Elementary School.
(Photo, Rose Servello)

Make It Matter and Linda Mahler for this wonderful opportunity. Continue making each moment matter!

Steven Atme is a pianist and composer, and is a public speaker, enlightening on his experience growing up and living with autism. Through his new venture, Creaversity, he offers private and group lessons. For information, contact atmepianosphd@hotmail.com. *

Galileo S.I.S. program offers activity-packed year

By Lisa Trotto and Martina Schiavone

The Galileo Adult Education Centre's Social Integration Services (S.I.S.) program is filled with diverse activities and enriching and innovative programs this school year. Having grown to accommodate 100 students, the program continues to promote independence and success for their special needs students.

The work skills program, headed up by Julie Mancini, Michel Massé and Luciana Franceschini, offers in-school task-oriented programs and community-based stages where students learn social skills, communication, organization, teamwork, planning, development and time management. The S.I.S. program embraces all learning styles, and promotes community integration. Once again, S.I.S. students are participating in stages at businesses like Maxi & Cie., Super C, Shell, Canadian Tire and more.

Psychiatric consultation a new service at the EMSB

By Despina Vassiliou

The student services department of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) has recently added the services of Dr. Gifuni, psychiatrist and Ph.D. student in neuroscience at McGill University. Gifuni comes to the EMSB with a wealth of knowledge and experience in various mental health areas, such as neuroimaging, social cognition, mood, suicide, late adolescents and therapy. His current work examines the neuroimaging biomarkers of suicidality in adolescence, with functional and structural scanning techniques.

Gifuni has been working within the EMSB community to build capacity in our schools by providing consultation services in a number of different ways, including professional development and ongoing training to the mental health professionals via monthly supervision meetings. These meetings are based on the needs and questions brought forth by the professionals in order to provide them with concrete and direct strategies to address student needs.

This work experience provides students with a sense of pride and accomplishment, and an awareness of their own aspirations and career-oriented goals.

The Galileo team welcomes new art teacher, Creative Arts Therapist Erica Onofrio. Through diverse media, students can explore and discover their artistic selves at their own pace. Topics covered under the guidance of Onofrio and Lu Termini include art history, sculpting, printmaking, painting and drawing workshops.

The students are already delighted with the new culinary program, led by talented chef and teacher Caroline Jelovcic, Dieter Paape, and Nancy Ruscitto. Students participate in recipe journaling, learn about hygiene and food safety,



Galileo's S.I.S. students husk corn at their annual corn roast.
(Photo, Galileo Adult Education Centre)

cooking, baking, etiquette and food science. A fun joint project with visiting Chef Tigréton began in October, where students learn from his wisdom in the kitchen. Students and staff also run Galileo's Snack Shack and Hot Lunch Program, our in-house services where they serve up healthy and affordable school snacks for the entire student body.

The academic program at Galileo offers all forms of communication, literacy, reading, writing and mathematics. Through this program, students gain the ability to analyze, evaluate, and create diverse forms of media alongside their teacher Lisa Trotto and Chiara Parisi. They are exploring media literacy, money skills, and English language arts. The class is creating their own YouTube

channel, podcast and school newspaper, *The Galileo Times*.

With leisure and social skills teacher Lisa Germile and Natalia Boczniewicz, S.I.S. students are making all natural soaps to sell, and creating "do it yourself" projects to showcase. They're learning different beats in their Brazilian percussions course, and enjoying yoga and meditation to reduce stress, increase flexibility, and improve posture.

Alain Tourigny, certified pet therapist and drama specialist, and Ralph Canella, offer pet therapy, puppeteering, and facilitate music, sensory therapy and drama for learning. Together they promote the creative arts through musical theatre and assist in the direction of the annual S.I.S. end-of-year show.

Accompany us on this ultimate adventure of learning and student growth! Visit us at www.gaec.ca, or @galileoadultcentre on Facebook and Instagram, or call 514-721-0120.

*Lisa Trotto is an S.I.S. Teacher and Martina Schiavone is the principal of Galileo Adult Education Centre. **



At the school level, Gifuni may meet with school-based teams in order to provide them with guidance and strategies on how to assist students with various mental health needs. For instance, if a school is interested in learning more about how to deal with students in general with depression then he can provide an information session to the school team on that topic. In some specific cases, Dr. Gifuni may also consult with the school team to provide strategies and steps to be undertaken next.

The EMSB continues to set the mental health needs of its students as a priority and Gifuni has become a key member in helping staff support the development of our students.

Despina Vassiliou, Ph. D. is a school psychologist at the English Montreal School Board. *

SAVE THE DATE MONTRÉAL WALK - JUNE 2019

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www.ascWalk.ca



Sports

With Sports Editor Daniel Smajovits

Swim to Survive helps teach critical life-saving skills

By Sandra Tirone

On August 19, 2015, Raphaël, who just turned four, managed to access the backyard pool using a toy (a Star Wars retractable sword) and opened safety latches on two doors while I was busy giving a bath to his brother. Raphaël was a very hyperactive, intelligent boy who was determined to fill a balloon with water from the pool.

We called 911 for a missing child and by the time we realized what happened it was too late. Raphaël had fallen into the pool and drowned.

Eighty-nine percent of accidental deaths of children with autism are caused by drowning. I used to think I was Super Mom and that I could handle anything and would have never imagined such a tragedy happening to my baby. Accidents happen when safety measures fail or are bypassed. Drowning is very unforgiving since it takes as little as 15 to 20 seconds. The year my son drowned, he was one of 67 drownings in Quebec alone.

Children with autism and/or ADHD like Raphaël tend to ignore danger and wander off, and it can be difficult to teach a special needs child the basics of swimming and safety. These may be some of the factors that explain the unbelievably high morbidity rate.

To honour Raphaël, I have devoted myself to raising awareness and focus on prevention so that collectively we keep our children safer. I have participated in the Swim to Survive Fund to help the Lifesaving Society implement a teaching standard in all schools in the province of Quebec.

The goal of the Swim to Survive program is to raise awareness and teach basic swimming skills that will help school-aged children to survive an unexpected fall into water. Swimming is a life skill that will keep kids safe throughout their lives. The sooner your child learns how to swim, the better. Ottawa has taken a



Litsa Tochtamis, Sandra Tirone, and Kelly Tochtamis exhibit *Swim To Survive* at the *Autism Speaks Canada - Montreal Walk 2018*.

step forward by offering a government subsidized program for children with autism to obtain free swimming lessons. It is my hope that Montreal follows suit, prioritizing such a service for our most vulnerable children.

If you have little ones, take extra precautions around pools:

- Always assign someone to supervise kids at the pool
- Invest in a pool alarm and/or tracker
- Teach your children to swim
- Discourage playing around the pool
- Keep the water clear
- Connect with your neighbours
- Re-evaluate dangers regularly
- Hire an expert to confirm safety measures are in place.

For more details, consult *Autism Parenting Magazine*, Issue 78 at <https://www.autismparentingmagazine.com> or visit the Lifesaving Society at <http://www.lifesavingsociety.com>. To donate to the *Swim to Survive Fund* in memory of Raphaël, visit <http://www.lifesavingsociety.com/swim-to-survive.aspx>.

To watch a commemorative video created to honour Raphaël David Foster, visit <https://youtu.be/gjG9vcSSg1Q>.

Sandra Tirone is a published author who advocates for the Lifesaving Society's *Swim to Survive* program, *Autism Speaks*, and *La maison des enfants Le Dauphin de Laval*, working to improve the lives of special needs children and their families.

Swimming up confidence for youth with special needs

By Randy Pinsky

Picture this: your family was just invited to spend the weekend at your old college buddy's cottage. Peace and quiet, bonfire meals, and a dock leading to a deliciously cool lake - sounds idyllic, doesn't it?

But for families with kids with disabilities, such an oasis away can be shadowed by the worry of potential dangers. In fact, the greatest number of injury-related death among youth with special needs involves water, with the risk of drowning being twice as high for youth on the spectrum (National Autism Association, 2016). In comes *Swimming With A Mission* (S.W.A.M.) at a pace faster than Olympian Penny Oleksiak!

Frustrated by the irony that the population most in need of water safety training is precisely the one least able to pay for private lessons, a group of McGill students decided to offer families swim classes that were both accessible and affordable. Formerly known as *SwimAbility* (and prior to that, *Making Waves*), S.W.A.M. is now approaching its 12th year. The organization is truly knocking down barriers to such needed services, as they offer a session of nine lessons for the price of an ordinary single one.

And things have been going swimmingly well!

What started off as a small group of volunteers has expanded to 13 student-run, non-profit chapters across Canada. Such efforts were greatly aided by winning the Forces Avenir student entrepreneurship grant in 2009 and soon after receiving funding from The Clinton Global Initiative University.

As consistency is key, swimmers remain with the same instructor for the entire session, enabling a close rapport to develop. Far from just gaining confidence in the water, the program also helps enhance self-esteem and social skills. McGill S.W.A.M. co-president Zoë Nadeau shared that while her 16-year-old student originally could barely make eye contact with her, he is now in fact, quite chatty!

Parents notice the changes from the very first lesson. From individuals who were petrified of water and had to be coaxed into the pool, emerge confident swimmers who almost have to be bribed to leave. Leyla Korany personally credits S.W.A.M for helping her daughter become "an independent swimmer," reinforcing the need for physical activity for youth with disabilities.

A mother of two on the spectrum, she reiterated how doubly critical such a service is as children with autism tend to love the sensory nature of water, making it a potential activity but also, a looming danger.



Swim instructor Paloma Hepler and her swimmer Albert. (Photo, Karam Nwilati)

While many of the benefits are of course tangible - water consciousness and technique - equally as critical are the intangible ones of a willingness to try new activities and the ability to bond with new individuals – all which extend far beyond the pool.

So regardless of their ability outside of the pool, by the end of the session, S.W.A.M. participants can proudly call themselves true swimmers. Armed with new self-confidence and skills, they are ready to dive into the next challenge that awaits them.

For information, visit <http://www.montreal.qc.swamcanada.ca>

Randy Pinsky is the office manager and communications assistant at TrueSelf Psychology. *



Sports

With Sports Editor Daniel Smajovits



Bouger comme le vent

Par Ralph-Bonet Sanon



Sur la photo : Une jeune athlète de l'école Philip E. Layton court lors du Défi sportif AlterGo d'avril 2018 au Complexe sportif Claude-Robillard à Montréal, en arborant un chandail sur lequel on peut lire les mots « Move like the wind ». (Photographe : Jean-Baptiste Benavent)

Depuis des années, des élèves montréalais ayant une déficience visuelle s'entraînent à persévérer dans le sport grâce à une formule inspirante.

Ces jeunes fréquentent l'école Philip E. Layton (PEL), un établissement spécialisé de Montréal où de jeunes sportifs s'encouragent l'un l'autre à « bouger comme le vent ».

Gowrish Subramaniam était l'un d'eux. Avant d'y terminer ses études primaires l'an dernier, il y a pratiqué la natation, la course et le saut en longueur.

Lorsqu'il s'exerçait chaque année en vue du Défi sportif AlterGo, ses camarades de classe, lui et leur professeur d'éducation physique se poussaient à « courir comme le vent ».

Celui qui fréquente aujourd'hui l'école secondaire Westmount High s'est long-

temps entraîné pour le 20 mètres avec corde et le 50 mètres avec guide.

« Je ne savais pas du tout qu'on pouvait utiliser une corde pour courir », partage le jeune adepte de musique traditionnelle sud-est asiatique.

« Ma motivation quand je m'entraîne à la course ou quand je participe au Défi, c'est d'atteindre mon plein potentiel, courir aussi vite que je peux », ajoute-t-il.

DEVISE

Cela fait maintenant huit ans que l'école PEL participe au plus grand rendez-vous sportif annuel montréalais des athlètes ayant une limitation fonctionnelle.

Elle y envoie habituellement de 6 à 10 athlètes, qui prennent part à des épreuves d'athlétisme et de natation.

En avril dernier, ils étaient près d'une dizaine à porter des chandails arborant l'expression « Move like the wind » (« bouge comme le vent » en français).

En marge du Défi sportif AlterGo, PEL décerne des prix intitulés « Je bouge comme... » afin de récompenser les élèves qui exécutent des mouvements lors d'activités physiques à l'école.

« Se heurter la tête ou le visage en courant ou en marchant quand on a une déficience visuelle, c'est traumatisant. Alors pouvoir courir sans crainte, au milieu de plein d'autres enfants qui font pareil, cela correspond au concept d'accessibilité universelle », commente leur professeur d'éducation physique, Jonathan Varghesse.

COMME LEURS PAIRS

Selon la spécialiste en orientation et mobilité Ingrid Osswald, qui aide des élèves de PEL, les enfants ayant une déficience visuelle sont généralement moins actifs physiquement et ont de moins bonnes habiletés motrices.

« Les occasions de bouger et de faire du sport sont moins nombreuses ou moins évidentes, explique-t-elle. Ces enfants sont souvent surprotégés, on ne veut pas qu'il leur arrive quelque chose et on a moins d'attentes de performance à leur égard. Ils peuvent aussi se retrouver isolés socialement, exclus des activités pratiquées par leurs pairs. Leur estime d'eux-mêmes peut en souffrir. »

Pourtant, comme tous les enfants, ceux ayant une déficience visuelle veulent être actifs et développent leurs habiletés à l'aide d'activités de mouvement.

Il faut donc les initier à ces activités à un jeune âge, leur permettre de courir comme leurs pairs et d'être inclus en toute circonstance.

« Il faudrait leur offrir des occasions de faire du sport adapté, aplanir les obstacles (financiers, sociaux, géographiques ou autres) que peut rencontrer une famille et amener des mentors à partager leurs témoignages et motiver ces enfants », mentionne l'experte.

Ralph-Bonet Sanon est chargé de communication chez AlterGo.

AlterGo est un OBNL qui soutient l'inclusion sociale des personnes ayant une limitation fonctionnelle par l'abolition des obstacles au loisir, au sport et à la culture. Le Défi sportif AlterGo, tenu chaque année depuis 1984 dans le Grand Montréal, réunit des milliers d'athlètes de niveau scolaire et d'élite venant du Canada et d'ailleurs. Pour nous joindre : 514 933-2739 ou info@defisportif.com.*

Déguédine! Les possibilités infinies du sport adapté

Par Maéva Blot et Zhou Zhou Li

Dans le cadre de notre cours « Service à la communauté » qui s'est déroulé pendant les sessions d'automne 2017 et d'hiver 2018, nous – étudiants en pharmacie de l'Université de Montréal – avons exploré la littérature afin d'identifier les barrières et facilitateurs de la pratique sportive chez les adolescents vivant avec un handicap physique ou sensoriel. Nous nous sommes également renseignés auprès de divers organismes communautaires afin de mieux comprendre la réalité de cette population vivant à Montréal ou dans ses environs.

Nos recherches et entretiens nous ont révélé qu'il existait un éventail de services et de ressources pour les adolescents vivant avec un handicap physique ou sensoriel. C'est pour cette raison que nous avons décidé de créer un site Internet regroupant non seulement ces ressources et services, mais également une panoplie de sports adaptés ainsi que des témoignages de personnes inspirantes dont Sarah White, future participante en athlétisme aux Jeux paralympiques de Tokyo 2020. Nous espérons que nos efforts auront permis d'augmenter la visibilité et l'accessibilité des ressources d'aide pour cette population.

Voici le lien vers notre site Internet : <https://deguedine17.wixsite.com/deguedine>

Bon surfing!

Maéva Blot et Zhou Zhou Li sont étudiants en deuxième année de pharmacie à l'Université de Montréal.



Zhou Zhou Li, Maéva Blot, Carla Karamé, Mohamad Issa, Silvana Rondon Gamarra, Amélie Bilodeau, Gabrielle Cardin et Jonathan Fournier, étudiants en pharmacie de première année (2017-2018) ayant participé à la conception du site Internet.

(Photographe : Joberthe Mars, étudiante en pharmacie)



Celebrating 40 years of friendship at West Island Citizen Advocacy

By Cindy Davis



Fred, Ike and Marla reminisce over photos documenting Fred and Ike's 40-year relationship after being matched as protégé and volunteer at WICA.

Ike Partington and Fred have been meeting almost every Wednesday for 40 years. In 1978, Ike was a young mother that Fred had the ability to walk. Ike was asked to meet with Fred on a weekly basis to help strengthen his legs and walking

skills. Using her baby carriage as a walker to support him, they would take weekly walks to Ike's house, where Fred would stay and help prepare and eat dinner with Ike's family. "We've had a longer association than most marriages," jokes Ike.

WICA's mission is to improve the quality of life and defend the rights of those living with a "handicapping condition" or who are disadvantaged, by supporting them and matching them with volunteers. WICA's founder, Joan Farley, was a pioneer in advocating for those with special needs and was awarded the Order of Canada for her advocacy. Today, WICA has approximately 320 one-to-one active matches, with some volunteers matched with more than one protégé.

"Ike and Fred are our poster people and our biggest success story in terms of longevity and quality," says WICA Director Marla Newhook, who says the program offers valuable social, emotional and practical support to its protégés.

Sitting with Ike and Fred as they peruse a photo album of memories they share including Christmas celebrations, corn roasts, and the birthdays of Ike's children

and grandchildren, the bond between the pair is evident. "She's a good woman," says Fred.

It's been rewarding for Ike's family as well. "I have three boys and they are all good men. They are community minded, they volunteer. There is a trickle down effect to having Fred be a part of the family for all those years."

In addition to the volunteer match program, WICA runs a housing program for those with mental health issues, art programs for the isolated and for seniors, a youth engagement program, a seniors advocacy program, and free courses on various topics, among many other projects and services.

Newhook says that volunteering doesn't have to be a heavy commitment and can be immensely gratifying. "If you're going to have coffee at Starbucks anyway, why not bring someone else with you?"

For information, visit volunteerwica.com.





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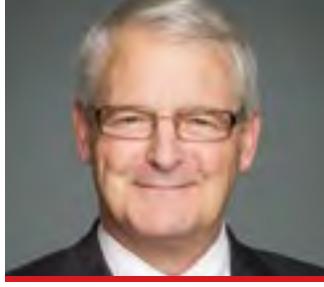


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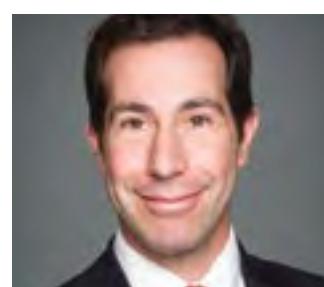
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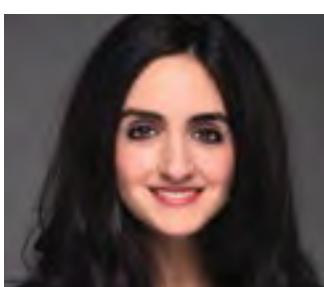
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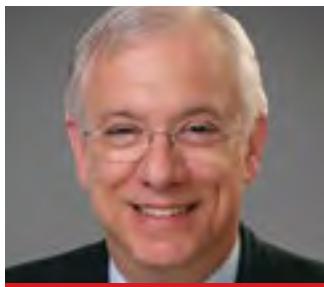
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'Choose Love' for change

By Wendy Singer



Teacher Connie Cassetta with the Choose Love banner replicated from a kindness card created by a student at Nesbitt Elementary School.

Scarlett Lewis founded the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement after her son was murdered in the Sandy Hook shootings in Newtown, Connecticut, in December 2012. In desperate search to reckon with this tragedy, Lewis concluded that the root cause of mass shootings is the inability of many young people to manage their emotions and connect with others.

To prevent further such tragedies, the author of *Nurturing Healing Love and Rose's Foal* became an advocate for social and emotional learning (SEL), which teaches children how to build friendships, have relationships, and manage their emotions in a healthy way. Her Choose Love Enrichment Program is designed for pre-kindergarten to Grade 11 students, and can be downloaded at no cost. With in-school and at-home components, this evidence-based program teaches children how to choose love under any circumstance. It utilizes character values, positive psychology, mindfulness, emotional intelligence, neuroscience and other tools to help children learn personal responsibility and the understanding that they always have a choice in how they respond.

Teacher Connie Cassetta shares a like-minded philosophy. When she heard Lewis speak five years ago at a Wayne Dyer event three months after the shootings, she knew she wanted to be a part of the movement. A Grade 6 teacher at Nesbitt Elementary School in Rosemount for the past 20 years, Cassetta credits her prior work at outreach school École Ynova with the PSBGM for helping her to understand that, "Positive social and emotional connections are essential on the path of academic and personal growth."

Cassetta uses the Jesse Lewis Choose Love program in her classroom. She begins each morning with a discussion about a poem, a quote, or an inspirational video that addresses issues like love, courage, and fear. "Most students aren't used to expressing and sharing their feelings," shared Cassetta with conviction. "Social and emotional skills can be taught and developed."

On June 7 and 8, Cassetta brought Lewis to Montreal to speak about the Choose Love at Home initiative to parents, and the in-school program to teachers and administrators. Cassetta raises funds for the move-

ment by selling peace and kindness cards made by her students, and is the Choose Love Ambassador for Quebec.

Cassetta's goal is to bring Lewis back to present her program to all school boards in Quebec. "The program embraces all students with all needs. It teaches that if you like each other, you won't hurt each other. And if you love yourself you won't hurt yourself," she said. "Had the Sandy Hook shooter been taught to change an angry thought for a loving one, the shootings may never have happened. We have a responsibility to teach them to be the change. As teachers we have the power to help children learn and develop these skills and in turn choose love."

Choose Love is now implemented in 48 states and 33 countries. It will be taught

in all schools in the state of New Hampshire.

To learn more about the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement, visit <https://www.jesselewischooselove.org>. *



A kindness card designed by Connie Cassetta's students to raise funds for the Jesse Lewis Choose Love Movement.

Building positive connections with your child and student

By Stephanie Paquette

In the early stages of my career as a social worker, the idea of working with children was daunting. I didn't feel properly equipped to work with a population that I considered vulnerable and I also needed to do some "growing up" before I could properly respond to a child's emotional needs. As I transitioned from working with adults to children, I was amazed by how quickly children pick up on the emotions of others, yet have difficulty managing their own. Young children do not always have the vocabulary to explain their emotions and words do not always appropriately convey what they are feeling. A child's behaviour, although at times disconcerting or downright frustrating, also provides adults with opportunities to understand their internal world and to create positive connections with them.

Creating positive connections with children may require us to step outside of our comfort zones and become creative. Parents or professionals working with children can cleverly use playfulness to connect with children. Playfulness provides moments of positive emotional release and opportunities for children to expose their enchanting internal worlds. Delighting in play with a child is also an invaluable tool to help break down social, economic, racial and cultural bar-

riers. Recently, my five-year-old was refusing to eat his breakfast. As I felt the irritation mounting inside of me, I put it aside and reverted to connection rather than correction. I painted a moustache on my face with his yogurt, which created a release of uncontrollable laughter from both of us and we rapidly turned this experience from a struggle to an attachment.

Children are wired to create connections in order to ensure their survival. Through our verbal and non-verbal actions, children rapidly decide who they will trust. It is with your words, your actions and your smile that your children form an image of themselves. In a context of safety, children will share and expose themselves; they will, however, only do so if they know that you accept their feelings, their mistakes and you provide them with unconditional love. When time is invested in building relationships and creating connections with children, the benefits are immeasurable and contribute to an increase in positive child behaviour and strong adult-child attachments.

Stephanie Paquette replaced Lori Rubin in November 2017 as a behaviour management specialist and Project Harbour coordinator at the EMSB. *



VANCOUVER

Adapted Travel

By Mike Cohen

Beautiful Vancouver provides facilities for tourists with special needs

VANCOUVER-With an estimated one in eight people worldwide living with a disability, disabled travellers now make up one of the fastest growing tourism markets. In North America alone, people with disabilities spend more than \$13 billion each year on travel. Their biggest challenge - finding accessible travel destinations that will meet their special needs and heighten their travel experience.

Consistently among the top five most liveable cities in the world, Vancouver (<https://vancouver.ca>) also enjoys a reputation as one of the world's most accessible places to visit. Thanks to its progressive transportation systems, innovative housing and recreational opportunities, people of all ages with visual, hearing or mobility impairments can fully enjoy business and leisure time in Vancouver.

Spinal Cord Injury BC has published *Accessible Travel Project*, which includes tutorial videos to help wheelchair users figure out getting to/from the airport, the steps needed to check in, go through security and transfer onto a plane. Log on to <https://sci-bc.ca/resource-centre/accessible-travel/>.

They also created *Your Accessible Travel Guide*, a travel tips eBook that is free to download at <https://sci-bc.ca/resource-centre/accessible-travel/accessible-travel-guide/>

As one of the world's most accessible airports, over the past 20 years, Vancouver International Airport (YVR) has worked to ensure all passengers with disabilities have a positive experience travelling to and from Vancouver. Outside the terminals, ramps and special curbside parking are available at both the Arrivals and Departures areas. Relief areas for guide dogs and service animals are also provided on the Arrivals level outside the main terminal. Throughout the airport, facilities include fully-accessible restrooms, phone booths and TTY phones, plain language signage, low-mounted flight information monitors, visual paging monitors and public ad-

dress systems, check-in counters adapted for wheelchairs, and contrasting, textured flooring to guide visually impaired travellers. Individual airlines have trained staff who can assist in escorting passengers through security checkpoints and to the gates. It is recommended that travellers with disabilities state their particular needs when booking, and again at the ticket counter. Additionally, YVR Airport Customer Care personnel can be reached at 604-207-7077.

The Canada Line of the SkyTrain connects YVR to Richmond and downtown Vancouver quickly and easily. The line is fully accessible by elevator from both the Arrivals and Departures level. More than 500 trained and licensed taxis currently serve the airport. Wheelchair-accessible taxis and vans are available, and no reservations are required. Curbside staff is available to provide assistance. Most airport rental car companies can provide accessible vehicles, but a minimum of 48 hours advance booking is required.

WHERE TO STAY: There are more than 24,000 rooms in Greater Vancouver and more than 13,000 in the downtown core. For this trip we based ourselves at the Landis Hotel & Suites (<https://www.landissuitesvancouver.com>) located downtown at 1200 Hornby Street. This is part of Mayfair Properties, which also owns the neighbouring Courtyard Marriott.

Here you have easy access to the city's buzzing business district, pedestrian-only shopping entertainment districts, gorgeous green spaces and spots like Stanley Park, the Vancouver Art Gallery, historic Gastown, hip Yaletown and more. The hotel is fully wheelchair accessible. Elevators can take you from the indoor parking garage to the lobby and any floor. The second floor pool area is accessible as well. The pool itself has a wheelchair lift.

The hotel offers deluxe, executive and penthouse suites. They are in the midst of renovations, replacing carpeting with hardwood floors and outfitting the rooms



The pool area at the Landis Hotel & Suites is wheelchair accessible.

with new furniture. Our executive suite featured a master bedroom with a luxurious king-size bed and a second bedroom with a comfortable queen-size bed. Both had cozy duvets and triple sheeting, black-out drapes, closet space with mirrored glass doors and a radio alarm clock. The kitchen offers ample cooking and storage space, and includes a full-size fridge with a freezer, a stove, an oven, a dishwasher, microwave, toaster and coffee maker. You can enjoy your meals or snacks in the dining area located on an enclosed balcony with city views. The glass-top table seats four. As well, you can sleep extra guests on the pull-out sofa sleeper in the nice-sized living room, which also features a 37-inch flat screen HDTV. Guests can relax after a busy day in the deep soaker tub in the full bathroom, which also features a shower and double sinks with a granite countertop. This is one of few hotels in Vancouver to feature all-suite accommodations and an indoor pool to play around in.

For more information about the hotel call toll free: 1-877-291-6111, email res@landissuitesvancouver.com or log on to www.landissuitesvancouver.com.



Scotiabank Field at Nat Bailey Stadium is complete with wheelchair accessible ramps.

PRO BALL: If you are a baseball fan, then the months of June, July and August represent an opportunity for you to see some good old-fashioned minor league ball. The Vancouver Canadians (www.canadiansbaseball.com) play out of the prettiest little ballpark in North America – 67-year-old Scotiabank Field at Nat Bailey Stadium. There are 6,413 seats here, every one of them dandy. The Canadians are the short season rookie "A" ball affiliate of the major league Toronto Blue Jays. There are a number of wheelchair reserved parking spaces at the ballpark and these are located in the parking lot off of Ontario Street along the east end of Scotiabank Field at Nat Bailey Stadium. This stadium recognizes the needs of guests with disabilities, and provides a wheelchair access viewing platform for fans with accessibility needs and their guests located down the third base line of the ballpark. Wheelchair access is provided through the third base gate located at the Southeast corner of Nat Bailey Stadium.

WHAT TO DO: The Sea to Sky Gondola ([https://www.seatoskygondola.com](http://www.seatoskygondola.com)) is located on Highway 99 just south of Squamish, a scenic 45-minute drive (depending upon traffic) from downtown Vancouver. A 10-minute gondola ride will take you up to a truly magical place with some of the most spectacular views you will ever see and activities for all interests and ages. We really enjoyed the experience, especially the memorable photographs we took where the backdrop was spectacular.

As you rise from the water's edge on the valley floor, the view opens up before you: the bright blue water of Howe Sound, dotted with green islands and backed by the steep mountains of the Coast Range; the majestic Stawamus Chief; and a bird's eye view of the town of Squamish with the rugged, snow-capped mountains to the north. The ride up and down is a thrilling adventure for all ages and provides new views of Shannon Falls and the famous Squamish Chief climbing area. You will arrive at the Summit Lodge where the experience continues. A popular spot for spectacular photos is the 100-metre Sky Pilot Suspension Bridge.

Adapted Travel VANCOUVER

If you would like to explore more, there are many walking and hiking trails for all ages and abilities, whether you want a backcountry adventure or a stroller/wheelchair friendly interpretive walk. These experiences are fully accessible to all. For those looking for a bit more adventure, the Via Ferrata (Italian for the "iron-way") is a great option. There are events happening



*The Sea to Sky Gondola
(Photo, Paul Bride)*

year-round at the Sea to Sky Gondola.

From Basecamp to Summit, the Sea to Sky Gondola makes it easy for people to connect with the great outdoors. All of the Basecamp and Summit Lodge facilities are wheelchair and stroller accessible. The gondola cabins are designed to accommodate both wheelchairs and strollers and are capable of slowing or stopping for ease of access. The patio and viewing deck at the Summit are wheelchair accessible (snow conditions permitting) and can be accessed on the left hand side of the building. The following amenities are available to make the Sea to Sky Gondola as accessible as possible: wheelchair accessible parking spaces directly adjacent to the Basecamp facilities; Accessibility window for ticket purchases at Basecamp; wheelchair accessible gender neutral washrooms available at the base and in the Summit Lodge (ask retail at Summit for directions); wheelchair accessible tables are available at the Basecamp Cafe and in the Summit Lodge; and baby changing tables at the base and at the summit.

Adult day tickets are \$39.95 when purchased online and \$41.95 at the ticket window. Check out ticket pricing and buy tickets online at <https://www.seatoskygondola.com>.

PLAYLAND: If you like amusement parks, Vancouver's Pacific National Exhibition (www.pne.ca) on East Hastings Street is the place to go. The 15-acre Playland Amusement Park is a popular attraction.

Open from late April through the end of September it has hosted millions of thrill seekers of all ages since it opened in 1910. The Park was named "Happy Land" in 1926 and remained on the original site until 1958, when it was moved to its present spot and re-opened under the name Playland. Previously owned by a number of parent companies, Playland became a division of the PNE family in July, 1993. Playland's marquee attraction, the beloved 1958 Wooden Roller Coaster, remains the most popular ride on the site and one of the most highly regarded wooden coasters in the world. Designed by the legendary ride construction team, Carl Phare and Walker LeRoy, the Playland Wooden Coaster rides over half a million people annually. The flume, though, ranks as a favourite as well. Unfortunately on the day we visited, it was not operational... Other popular rides include wave swinger, west coast wheel, breakdance, the scrambler, the corkscrew, rock climbing, the hellevator, bumper cars, the pirate ship and music express. Tamer rides include the merry-go-round, cool cruzers, the super slide, raiders, helicopters, tea cups and honeybee express. There are the traditional carnival games, an arcade and plenty of food options. This place is a lot of fun and I would highly recommend you spend the day there. It was a memorable experience for my sister-in-law as this was her four-year-old's very first visit to an amusement park. He felt so adult behind the wheel of his own car (cool cruzers), driving a motorcycle (choppers) and climbing aboard the kids' rollercoaster (Kettle Creek Mine Coaster). I thought he was quite daring to go on the wave swinger. The PNE is wheelchair accessible. Disabled access is provided at one bathroom stop near the midway.

DINING OUT: There are some superb restaurants in Vancouver. Here are some in particular I strongly recommend.

JOE FORTES SEAFOOD & CHOP HOUSE

First let me tell you about Joe Fortes Seafood & Chop House (www.joefortes.ca) on downtown Thurlow Street. It has become our "go to" place while in Vancouver. On this night we were a party of five adults and a four-year-old. The hostess seated us on the gorgeous roof garden. Our server Jennifer, who also works as a manager on some nights, gave us a thorough look at the menu and the day's many specials.

One of Joe Fortes many unique qualities is the immediate sense of character and personality that guests recognize the moment they step inside. The large, bright room feels instantly powerful, yet inviting. With a commitment to freshness, the Joe Fortes kitchen receives daily local deliveries, ensuring that you're guaranteed to find the freshest ingredients on your plate every day.

Joe Fortes Seafood & Chop House has been specializing in classic, American cuisine since 1985. The kitchen prepares each dish with a focus on natural flavours and features the finest ingredients collected from Pacific Northwest farmers, fishermen and food artisans. Serving more than 50 kinds of fresh fish, including their legendary Seafood Tower on Ice, premium oysters and succulent chops, their signature dishes have become a favourite of locals, celebrities and tourists alike. From our previous two visits, the Seafood Tower on Ice was on our "must eat" list and it did not disappoint us. The five adults in our party shared two towers, almost a meal on its own, featuring chilled Atlantic lobster, local oysters, marinated clams and mussels, scallop ceviche, albacore tuna crudo and chilled jumbo prawns. We also added a crispy crab cake and some scallops.

Since we have been to Joe Fortes before, we had some valuable experience as to how to navigate the impressive menu. Three members of the group decided to have the best of both worlds – splitting the petit mignon and the most delicious cuts of fish we've ever experienced - miso marinated sable fish with sides of sesame quinoa, mushrooms, edamame, kale and sweet soy and café de Paris butter gratin, potato pavé, and market vegetables. I opted for the Sirloin Steak (seven oz.),



The main level of Joe Fortes Seafood & Chop House.

with buttermilk mashed potatoes and jasmin rice. Given the large serving I already enjoyed from the Tower, this was the perfect size of meat. The other member of our group chose the Scallop dinner from the special menu of the day. As for our little four-year-old nephew, he feasted on some macaroni and cheese. There were drinks as well for some of us, bellinis, a vodka martini and a glass of wine.

While pretty much full, the dessert menu was too appetizing to ignore so we agreed to share a piece of chocolate sin cake with ganache, brandy and chocolate brittle and half orders of traditional tiramisu with mascarpone cream, lady fingers, espresso, kahlua and baileys and the Tahitian vanilla Crème Brûlée, with house-made biscotti and whipped cream. Needless to say, we all left with smiles on our faces.

For individuals with mobility issues Joe Forte's has ground level seating as well as a single stall restroom on the main floor. There is also valet parking for a fee.

The Sandbar

I also recommend you check out the four extraordinary restaurants that make up the Sequoia Company of restaurants at VancouverDine.com. We opted in flavour of the Sandbar (<https://www.vancouverdine.com/sandbar>) on Granville Island.



The Sandbar Terrace.

There is live music here seven nights a week and quite a marvelous ambiance. The 300-seat restaurant was packed the night we chose to dine there. Guests can enjoy the bustle of the market, the non-stop energy of False Creek and the shores of Vancouver's West End. Walk up the wood post staircase, the only item that was salvaged from the historic Mulvaney's Restaurant site, and elevate your view of the city waterfront. The busy animated open kitchen gives the guest that "Granville Is-


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land Market feeling" plus an up-close look at the chefs as they prepare their seafood creations.

The Sandbar serves up the freshest seafood in a warm, sophisticated atmosphere. Suspended above the bar in the Teredo Lounge is Kivi, a 24 foot salmon troller hand built by Allan Farrell, one of the West Coast's finest craftsman of wooden boats. Fresh oyster bar, tapas, dinner and dancing, this is considered to be Vancouver's most popular spot to see and be seen.

Along with your menu comes a clipboard called the Seafood Fresh Sheet, with holes punched next to the items that are fresh that day.

We were a group of five adults and one four-year-old, who was thrilled with the kid's menu/colouring page. He happily enjoyed his pizza while using his crayons to the max, creating some masterpieces of his own. The adults, meantime, started off with some French martinis, a margarita and a glass of white wine before sharing a magnificent Sandbar Tower - eight jumbo prawns, 12 oysters, ahi tuna poke, salmon sashimi, king crab and lobster. I ordered a delicious cup of clam chowder while the table also shared a trio of superb sushi rolls: California (Dungeness crab, avocado, cucumber, tobiko and mayonnaise) and Tuna Goma-ae (albacore tuna, Chef Hoshi's special sesame sauce and green onion) and special scallop (diced scallop, tobiko, mayonnaise).

For the main course, a few of us gravitated toward the clipboard. I wanted something authentically B.C. and found it in the Wild Sockeye Salmon with mango papaya salsa, citrus butter and sauce. On the side I had some rice and roasted potatoes. It was a good choice. Two others chose the Sable fish (black cod) with a miso ginger glaze while another opted for the Ahi tuna, seared rare with soy mustard, wasabi, cucumber and salsa. The crab & shrimp Louie was the final item selected by a member of our party - fresh Dungeness crab, hand-peeled shrimp, egg, avocado, tomatoes, cucumbers and creamy Old Bay dressing. Their steaks are said to be very good as well, something we will have to consider on our next visit. For dessert we managed to share two decadent choices: the lemon torte and some to die for chocolate cake, accompanied by a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Our little nephew, his pizza completely digested, was more than

happy to take part in this final tasting of the evening.

The restaurant is fully handicapped accessible, including an elevator to bring patrons in wheelchairs up to the second and third floors.

Bridges

Bridges (www.bridgesrestaurant.com) was always one of my favourite spots when I used to frequent Vancouver for business a number of years ago. This restaurant has been a landmark on Vancouver's waterfront for over 27 years.

Located next to the public market on historic Granville Island, Bridges serves the freshest seafood Vancouver has to offer. Set near the Arts Club Theatre and Maritime Market, Bridges offers magnificent views of Vancouver's waterfront, mountains and city center. Bridges Dining Room, Bar, Bistro and outdoor dining are the quintessential summer experience in Vancouver. Served by public moorage, Aquabus and False Creek Ferries, Bridges is easily reached by the water and has hundreds of free parking stalls for automobile access. It is open daily, from 11 a.m. One of my oldest friends, Clifford Margolese, moved to Vancouver 35 years ago. When I asked if we could meet for lunch, he immediately suggested Bridges. It was my first time back in 10 years and the place has not lost any of its charms. On this beautiful day we stayed out on the patio, looking out at the waterfront.

Bridges operates a second floor dining room with 150 seats inside and a 40 seat terrace. On the main floor is a 120-seat bistro and a 100-seat bar with its own terrace, both fully wheelchair accessible.

Clifford and I shared some deliciously fresh oysters with pickled ginger mignonette and calamari with house made tzatziki, with crispy fried onions and jalapenos. For my main meal I remembered how good the grilled chicken club burger was, featuring free-range chicken breast and crispy bacon served with fries. You can switch the latter for another side if you wish.

Clifford, always the healthy eater, chose the mixed green salad, featuring market fresh vegetables, organic greens and honey lemon vinaigrette. He added a salmon filet as well.

I was able to coax my friend into sharing some desserts – the decadent chocolate cake and the equally fantastic lemon layer cake. It was worth the cheat for both of us and a great suggestion from our server Charlie.

Bridges is located at 1696 Duranleau Street. For more email info@bridgesrestaurant.com or call 604-687-4400.

Gotham

We got to experience Gotham Steakhouse and Bar (<https://gothamsteakhouse.com>) at 615 Seymour Street for the first time. The menu is simple and classic steakhouse, with only the finest ingredients making the cut. Hand-crafted cocktails and extensive wine list make decisions just a little harder, but satisfaction guaranteed.

The restaurant is sophisticated and elegant, but the atmosphere is comfortable and relaxed. You never know who may turn up on any given day. Gotham counts well-known performers, actors, sports icons and local legends all among its regular guests. It features soaring ceilings, sumptuous leather and velvet upholstery and, private dining rooms.

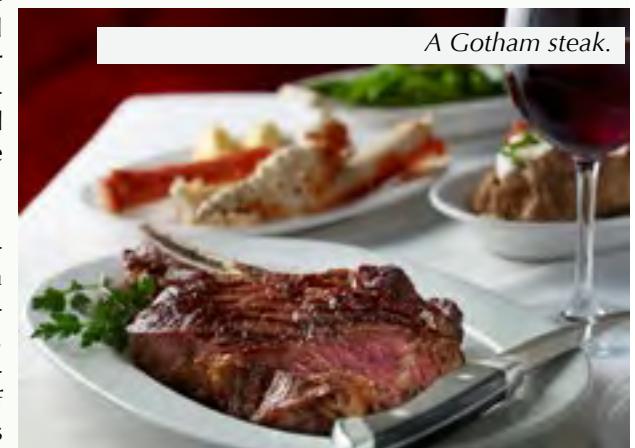
Dinner at Gotham is an occasion to remember. The à la carte menu features classic steakhouse favourites, perfectly prepared and presented in an atmosphere of luxurious comfort. The beef is Prime Grade Alberta, 28-day aged, and simply seasoned to bring out maximum flavour. The fish and seafood is delicate and fresh, and the delicious and decadent side dishes are perfect accompaniments to complete a memorable dinner.

There are two levels, with an elevator providing handicapped access to the second floor and to the basement where you will find the washrooms and some private rooms used for groups and special occasions. A seasonal urban garden patio is popular as well. All of the servers wear white tops. Our waiter Ryan has been with Gotham for 14 years.

Our party of six included one four-year-old who loved his choice from the kids menu – a grilled cheese sandwich and mashed potatoes. After starting out with

some drinks, we went directly to our main courses: a 32-ounce bone-in rib steak, served sliced, and nicely shared by two people; a perfectly prepared filet; the Blackened Ahi Tuna; and the fish of the day, which happened to be halibut with risotto and vegetables included. We all shared some sides of mashed potatoes, creamed spinach and fresh steamed broccoli. We will hopefully try items like the Seafood Tower, the jumbo lobster tail and the fresh oysters on our next visit. To cap the night off, we also shared the decadent Belgian Chocolate Bourbon Cake. It was an absolutely superb meal in a great ambience. Gift cards are available in different denominations and a very nice option if you would like to surprise a family member or business associate with something they would truly appreciate.

The house DJ is on duty for social hour, from 3 pm to 6:45 pm, Wednesday to Friday. And when the summer sun shines, he takes his mix of contemporary sounds to the patio for chilling al fresco. Tuesday through Saturdays they feature some of



A Gotham steak.

Vancouver's most talented musicians in the sensuous lounge from 7 p.m. to 11 p.m. This is perfect for cocktails before dinner or a luxurious after dinner drink.

Executive Chef Jean Claude is from France. He honed his skills over winters in the Alps and summers in St. Tropez. Arriving in Montreal in 1992, he spent six years at Le Soubise, then moved to Vancouver, furthering his experience at several well-known local restaurants, including as Chef-Owner of Cyrano. Since 2005, with grace, skill and good humour, he has led the Gotham kitchen.

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



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Shark diving jaunt excels as awesome and accessible for all

By Daniel Smajovits

Bobbing up and down with only a metal cage separating you and two great white sharks is definitely a unique experience; but in Gansbaai, South Africa, a two-hour drive from Cape Town, this is routine for the guests and staff of the White Shark Diving Company (www.sharkcagediving.co.za).

Operating for 20 years, the White Shark Diving Company is located in the heart of Shark Alley, a strip of water popular with sharks due to the abundance of seal pups. At its peak, 2,000 great whites roamed its waters, but today, due to fishing, poaching and depletion in food, the population of sharks in the area has declined to roughly 500. White Shark Diving Company is focused on conservation and social responsibility initiatives as well as tourism.

This shark diving excursion is fully accessible. In fact, prior to our visit in June, the White Shark Diving Company welcomed

a group of war veterans, which included five double amputees and one quadruple amputee. The exceptionally experienced crew stands ready to ensure that individuals of all abilities can enjoy this once-in-a-



A group of war veterans experience shark diving with the White Shark Diving Company in Gansbaai, South Africa. (Photo, White Shark Diving Company)

lifetime excursion. No swimming or SCUBA certification is necessary, and if you are fearful of the water or the predators within it, a crewmember will join the guest in the cage to ensure their well-being.

The trip is a whirlwind of excitement and apprehension. After a 15-minute ride out to sea, the crew uses chum (fish parts, bones and blood) to lure the shark to the boat. Luck plays a role in one's experience; on our trip, within minutes, a shark

caught the scent and a dorsal fin was seen making a beeline for the boat.

While viewing the shark from above is a thrill unto itself, it does not compare to the adrenaline rush that comes from being in the water. Floating in between steel bars alongside seven of your new best friends, when a crewmember signals that the shark is near, you take a

deep breath, grab the handlebar and push yourself down to see the majestic predator only inches away.

The White Shark Diving Company's daily tours educate the public on these fish and their importance in the marine world. We were fortunate to be joined on our trip by Mary, a marine biologist, who complemented our experience with her acute knowledge. This company operates the Shark & Marine Research Institute, which is dedicated to protecting and conserving marine life as well as safeguarding the health and vitality of South Africa's oceans. They explore, discover and monitor elasmobranch species (sharks, rays, skates and sawfish) through various scientific research projects, and help protect the long-term future of these species by translating this knowledge into evidence-based conservation initiatives.

Trips are weather dependent and the White Shark Diving Company runs trips only if the sea conditions allow for it. Sightings are not guaranteed. Should you not have a shark encounter, the White Shark Diving Company will offer a free voucher for a return trip, valid for one year. *

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