

INSPIRATIONS

A Snapshot of Our Special Needs Community



Fall 2008

Vol.1 No. 1

Let us Introduce Ourselves

Welcome to the first edition of *Inspirations*, a new publication geared towards special needs individuals and their families.

The English Montreal School Board, a leader in catering to special needs children and young adults, is proud to be sponsoring *Inspirations*. This will initially be published twice annually (fall and spring) and be distributed widely in the Greater Montreal area to English school boards, institutions dealing with special needs individuals, hospitals, CLSCs, doctors' offices, community organizations, the media and government. It will also be available at many dropoff points across the island, including shopping malls, city halls, libraries and restaurants. Look for our special *Inspirations* racks. In addition, we will be distributing the first edition at the Quebec Provincial Association of Teachers (QPAT) convention at the end of November at the Palais des congrès, where the EMSB has a kiosk.

Inspirations will provide uplifting success stories in the area of special needs. We will also have experts in various fields provide timely advice to parents. While the EMSB is the publisher, the content will ultimately cover the entire Greater Montreal area.

Through the pages of *Inspirations* we will bring you feedback from psychologists, guidance counsellors, speech and language pathologists, autism spectrum disorder consultants, behavior specialists, social workers and physiotherapists. We'll go into the classrooms of the intellectually and physically handicapped, as well as examine how the visually and hearing impaired population cope day to day. The underlying message is that all of these people continue to be "Inspirations" to all of us.

We are confident that *Inspirations* will carve an important role in the community. I would like to thank my colleague Lew Lewis and our wonderful editorial board team for getting this project off the ground. We welcome your feedback at inspirations@emsb.qc.ca. Log on to our website at www.emsb.qc.ca/inspirations for advertising rates.

Mike Cohen
Editor

Remarkable Autistic Teen shares his power of speech

By Stewart Lazarus

John McCluskey won't be taking his "precious power of speech" for granted.

Perhaps students rarely reflect on their power of speech, even during a public speaking competition. McCluskey, however, recognizes his gift every day. That is because he has autism. Last June he graduated from Vincent Massey Collegiate, an elite high school which requires entrance exams. His passionate speech, "On the Ethical Treatment of People with Autism," tied for first place in the Secondary V division of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) Public Speaking Competition. He went on to represent the EMSB at the Montreal Rotary Club finals.

McCluskey, 17, says his speech was more than just a school assignment, but also an opportunity to compete. He saw a greater purpose in writing his speech. "With my gift, I will be the voice for those people with autism without voices," he declared. "When I say that people with autism don't have voices, I'm not referring to people with autism who can't speak. Whether young autistic students can speak or not, their needs and rights are ignored. They have no voice. Autism is a trait that sticks out in the crowd. My goal is to make sure that people don't only see me as being autistic, but that they see that I'm a real person."

McCluskey stresses that he experiences the same emotions and enjoys the same hobbies as any teenager would. In his speech, he said that people with autism are bullied and abused because they are not seen as real people. He was quick to point out, though, that he was not bullied, nor did he experience any abuse at Vincent Massey Collegiate. "I was never bullied in school," he remarked. "The students and teachers treated me with the respect I deserved."

Jocelyne Lécompte, John's mother, is a pediatrician by profession and the director general of Giant Steps Montreal, a non-profit organization offering a complete range of educational services and therapies to autistic children between the ages of four and 21. She can't say enough about her son's experience at Vincent Massey. "John loved going to school every morning," she said. "At Vincent Massey his unique needs were met without making him feel different."

McCluskey's teachers have nothing but praise for him. Sonia Starinieri, a child care worker assigned to Vincent Massey by Giant Steps, calls McCluskey "a great example of perseverance and determination despite many challenges. Many things don't come naturally easy to him. Although there were things that were difficult for John he always insisted on trying it on his own first without help. He never wanted special treatment or to be different from the others and I

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John McCluskey (centre) shares a moment with his former Vincent Massey Collegiate classmates.



Briefly Noted

AUTISM AWARENESS GALA: On Saturday November 8, the third annual Autism Awareness Gala will be taking place at the beautiful Buffet Crystal located at 5285 Henri Bourassa Ouest in St Laurent. Doors will open at 6 pm and dinner and entertainment will be provided once again by Mike Kennedy beginning at 7 pm. Joey Elias and Caroline Seguin will serve as the emcees and there will be a Chinese Auction as well. Former Montreal Canadiens Stanley Cup winning coach Jean Perron will be the guest of honour and keynote speaker. Tickets are \$85 (tables of 10) and all proceeds benefit the Montreal Children's Hospital Autism Clinic. Families desperately need support to deal with the challenges of the 24/7 care these individuals require. The Montreal Children's Hospital's Autism Clinic has been providing support to families since 2003. "The Montreal Children's Hospital Autism Clinic is where it all begins," says Melissa Vitulano, president of the Autism Awareness Gala Committee and parent of an autistic daughter. If you are interested in attending and/or volunteering, please contact Melissa at 514-758-6396. You can also visit the website at www.autism-awareness-gala.org or email autismgala@aol.com. Chinese Auction and/or door prize donations are always needed and appreciated.

FOSTER HOMES: There are many children aged 17 and younger who need to find a family that will reach out and provide them with support. These children have experienced difficulties in their previous family environment, whether it be negligence, rejection or physical or sexual abuse. They often have special needs and may present emotional or social difficulties, exhibit developmental delays, have medical problems or behavioural issues. Tenderness, attention and care are important, as is nurturing, stability, stimulation and structure, whether it be for one or two weekends per month, or for the short/medium or long term. There

is an extreme shortage of foster homes for English speaking children of many races, cultures and ethnicities. If you are 25 and over, single or a couple, with or without children, you can offer your services. Professional support and a tax-free stipend to cover the costs of caring for a child are provided. For further information, please call Batshaw Foster Homes for Children, 514-932-7161 and ask for Rena Rubin (1169) or Annie Alexander (1139).

PEACEMAKERS: Hampstead Elementary School recently received a \$7,000 grant from the Alex and Ruth Dworikin Foundation Tolerance Initiative Fund, administered by the Canadian Jewish Congress Quebec Region, for a program



Corey Szwarcock of Dynamix talks to students as part of the Peacemakers Program.

called Peacemakers, which was introduced by Dynamix Adventures (www.getdynamix.com) for all students from Kindergarten to Grade 6. Hampstead Elementary School serves a broad socio-economic level of students and for several years was classified as a category 2 inner-city core English school. In fact, 95 percent of the students are bussed in from various parts of the island of Montreal including, Côte-des-Neiges, Saint-Henri, Ville Émard and Little Burgundy. In addition, a large number of the Hampstead School population has special needs, which can range from mild learning difficulties to handicaps. Consequently, many students are unable to partici-

pate in after-school activities and are therefore deprived of the opportunity to interact with one another on a social level, rendering it more difficult for the students to respect each other's differences and embrace the multicultural environment of the school. The implementation of Peacemakers has fostered global respect, tolerance and good citizenship amongst the student population and taught them lifelong social skills that positively impacted their day to day peer interactions. "The goal of Peacemakers is to teach students to tolerate each other's differences, be it cultural, social, academic or otherwise," says Corey Szwarcock, the director of Dynamix. "Through various experiential based learning activities,

students will have to work together using techniques taught in class by professional facilitators. The students will learn the importance of respect, honesty, kindness and patience so that collectively they can resolve conflicts and better co-exist as a community. The students will assume the ever important social responsibility of tolerance that not only fosters a peaceful school community but the greater community as well."

FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE

CLE: The Friendship Circle of Montreal is in the midst of an \$8 million capital campaign to build a 26,000 square foot activities centre and a life-sized movie-set town featuring a drugstore, grocery, pet shop, working traffic lights, movie theatre, doctor's office, bank and library. They have assumed ownership of a former synagogue in Snowdon, a block away from the Jewish General Hospital. The Friendship Circle of Montreal was founded in 2001 as a way for special needs children to meet other children and develop skills and improve their confidence. For more information log on to www.friendshipcircle.org.

INSPIRATIONS

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Christina Sophia Koutras: Profile of a Special Olympian

By Clarise Samuels

When Christina Sophia Koutras, 15, won the silver medal for figure skating at the Special Olympics Canada Winter Games last February in Quebec City, one of her mentors, Julia Venditti, heard the announcement on the news.

What was the reaction of Julia, a Vincent Massey Collegiate student, when she found out that coaching the ambitious Christina had paid off so handsomely? "Oh, wow, cool. Good for her," she remarked.

Both Julia Venditti, 17, and Alissa Malorni, 16, helped pave the road to Christina's success. The two Vincent Massey students fulfilled the requirements for their community service by helping Christina reach her full potential on the ice rink in preparation for the Special Olympics. Julia in particular took the young Christina under her protective wing. "We were lucky to be friends," said Julia. "She's a hard-working girl who puts her mind to anything she does."

Christina, a special needs student at Laval Catholic High School, took up figure skating when she was eight years old. She had been looking for a sport, and she already had the Special Olympics in mind as a goal. At the time her options were limited to either figure skating or swimming, since playing competitively in group sports did not appeal to her. The choice was easy—when



Christina Sophia Koutras receives her medal at the 2008 Winter Games.

Christina saw the beautiful outfits the figure skaters had to wear, she was sold. And it became evident she was a natural. "I think she fell once the first time she went out on the ice," said Christina's mother Anne-Marie. "But she has not fallen since."

It did not take long for Christina to start honing her skills. In December of 2003 she was awarded Best Improved Skater of the Month by the figure skating club of St. Leonard, the community rink where Christina goes to practice. Not only did Christina

enjoy the sport, she found skating motivated her. "It has always been one very positive thing in her life," her mother noted.

Christina's rapport with Julia Venditti proved to be another turning point. "Christina developed a very nice friendship with Julia," Ms. Koutras recalled. "Christina really admired her—Julia skates wonderfully, she was a little older, and very pretty—a good role model. Christina felt she and Julia were like sisters."

Christina's coach at the St. Leonard figure skating club is Isabelle Perreault, an extremely supportive mentor who gives her instructions in French, every word of which Christina, an English Montrealer, now understands.

Christina spent nine days in Quebec City and enjoyed her independence as an athlete at the event. The National Winter Games in Quebec City were accompanied by a media blitz. Christina was interviewed by CTV News just before the figure skating competition. "I didn't come here to win," she insisted, "just to do my best." In spite of such protestations, Christina had her eye on the gold, but she accepted her silver medal as a well-earned consolation prize.

Christina is presently attending John Grant High School in Côte Saint-Luc.

Special Olympics oath: "Let me win. But if I cannot win, let me be brave in the attempt."

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Hampstead mayor coped with severe hearing loss as a student

By Mike Cohen

William (Bill) Steinberg recently returned to Hampstead Elementary School for one of his regular visits. More than 50 years ago he was a student there as a special needs student, having been born with a sensorineural hearing loss, with damaged hair cells in the cochlea. Today, he is the mayor of Hampstead and a successful businessman.

"At birth it was a severe to moderate loss at that time," Mayor



CJAD's Andrew Carter interviews Mayor Steinberg at Hampstead School.

Steinberg says. "It was diagnosed when I was in Grade 2 and I got a hearing aid built into my glasses at that time. However, in those days they did not have the sophisticated hearing aids that we have today so it was basically an amplifier. For a little kid that meant that background noise was very loud and uncomfortable so I simply didn't start using it until the second term of Grade 5. At that point my marks shot up dramatically."

And how did he cope?

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Autism Spectrum Disorders: The Benefits of the Inclusive Classroom

By: Tania Piperni

I met Brenda at age four in her pre-kindergarten class when she screamed as a form of communication; the tantrums were loud and frequent. Her classmates did not understand why she did this, they simply played alongside her when she allowed them to.

In kindergarten, Brenda's school year began with tantrums, but things soon began to change. Her school team and home ABA (Applied Behaviour Analysis) therapists taught Brenda to use verbal language. She made tremendous progress that year, interacting more with her peers, and even began to speak French! Today, Brenda is in Grade 1. She starts her day by running in the gym to release any anxiety. Next, her visual schedule is explained to her at which time she sets off to the computer to work on reading and writing skills. She is a happy child, who loves to sing and dance, and enjoys playing with friends as well as doing things on her own. Many of Brenda's friends have been with her since pre-kindergarten. They do not know that Brenda has autism; they are simply content playing together and allowing her to be herself. This is today's inclusive classroom at its best.

There has been a rise in the number of children diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD). According to the Centre for Disease Control, the current rate of incidence worldwide is one in 150. ASD is a pervasive developmental disorder that affects neurological development. There are impairments in social interactions and in communication; furthermore, there can be repetitive behaviours and activities. These features can vary in severity and are unique to each individual with the diagnosis.

As a result of this statistic, the number

of students with a diagnosis of ASD is increasing in school boards across Quebec. In the 2006-2007 school year, there were almost 5,000 students with ASD in Quebec's public sector; 1400 of them on the island of Montreal (MELS, 2007). Across Quebec there has been a 16 percent increase in the number of students with ASD since 2004. Thus, the population of students with special needs is increasing, be it from better diagnostic measures, more inclusive criteria, or an actual higher rate of ASD.

In the 1990s, the school boards in Quebec adopted an inclusive education policy indicating that all students with special needs have the right to be educated in a regular classroom environment with same age peers. Students with ASD are immersed in a setting where they are exposed to models that they can imitate and engage with; at the same time, specially tailored academic goals are set by the teacher to best meet the needs of these students. Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) are written by the school team. They formalize academic and social goals based on the specific needs of each student. Thus, the student with ASD in an inclusive classroom is benefiting from the social experiences from peers and the regular classroom environment; as well as from a detailed curriculum created explicitly for him/her.

So what benefits are the "neurotypical" peers gaining? A tremendous amount. They are becoming more sensitized to students with a variety of disabilities. Most have been in a class where at least one student with special needs has been in the classroom. They have had experience with children with behaviour difficulties, others who have no language, and some who have



These students at Elizabeth Ballantyne Elementary School are part of an inclusive classroom.

odd speech but can give detailed accounts of every model airplane! Most students cannot verbalize why a peer needs help. They simply understand that s/he does, so they do. We are raising a much more tolerant society than when students with disabilities were segregated from the regular population. Now most students have had a friend with a disability and they have learned to accept people's differences.

Our inclusive classrooms are teaching life skills without a textbook. We are teaching our students to excel despite obstacles, be tolerant of others, interact through dif-

ferent modes of communication, persevere until solutions can be found, try novel approaches to gain positive results, maximize strengths and minimize weaknesses. This inclusive school setting has turned into a life experience of understanding others for who they are and not for what they are unable to do. Perhaps we can all learn a life lesson from this.

Tania Piperni is the Autism Spectrum Disorder Consultant at the English Montreal School Board.

(continued from page 1)

admired that even if teachers were always kind and supportive enough to give him what he needed."

How did he get along with other students? "The social aspect and communication is one of his most difficult areas yet he still tried his best when interacting with others," says Starinieri. "He gained the respect and understanding of his peers who were willing to help him, include him especially in group work which was never easy for him."

According to Janice Woodfine, McCluskey was "a dream student, a natural learner who is interested in thinking about

and discussing a wide range of ideas from all subject areas-literary, artistic, and scientific."

Teacher André Larivière confesses that at the beginning he was uncomfortable with autism, especially when it came to language acquisition. "However," he says, "John helped my teaching methodology because I returned to the basics of the teaching. He is a young man with self-assurance, a real professional and very personable."

Michael Zoes says McCluskey was passionate about history and very bright. "Whatever he read or heard was learned with great depth," he said. "He could make

sense of complicated historical facts."

McCluskey says he hopes to challenge people's perceptions of autism. "I want people to see that even though I am autistic I can still accomplish anything I put my mind to," he says. "I want to prove that people with autism can succeed and because of that we deserve equal rights and treatment."

This year McCluskey is continuing his studies at Marianopolis College in Pure and Applied Sciences. He hopes to become an architect or a theoretical physicist.

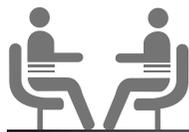


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An Interview with Lew Lewis

By Clarise Samuels

Lew Lewis is director of the Student Services Department of the English Montreal School Board. Inspirations sat down to talk to Mr. Lewis about the changing times vis-à-vis special needs students in the public education system.

Inspirations: How would you define a special needs student?

Lew Lewis: To some extent, every child has special needs—whether the child is average, has difficulties or is a prodigy—for example, the child who is brilliant in mathematics has special needs, and such needs must be addressed. But the true spirit of special needs as defined by the Ministère de l'Éducation, du Loisir et du Sport (MELS) consists of two groups—one with handicaps, social maladjustments and learning disabilities, i.e. special education students, and another group considered as “at-risk,” meaning they display characteristics likely to affect learning and socialization. Those “at-risk” students are vulnerable and require intervention so that they do not become special education students later on.

Inspirations: How are the handicaps of the first group categorized?

Lew Lewis: The MELS classification gives us four “clusters.” Cluster number one includes handicapped students who have, for example, autism spectrum disorders, severe motor impairments, moderate to severe intellectual handicaps, visual or auditory impairments, speech and language

disorders, etc. Cluster number two consists of students with severe behavioural disorders that make them aggressive, destructive, violent, etc. Cluster number three students have behavioural difficulties that make them overactive, underactive, or perhaps verbally abusive. Cluster number four students have learning disabilities or mild intellectual handicaps.

Inspirations: How are the needs of these different groups addressed?

Lew Lewis: Depending on the child's



Lew Lewis

level of functioning, we can integrate him or her into a regular classroom with resources or provide special education classes or special education schools when deemed appropriate. Each school board has a different educational orientation. The EMSB has adapted a hybrid model, where-

in we include special needs students in regular classrooms when appropriate; otherwise, other options are explored. So a severely low-functioning child might be better suited to a special education class or special education school, while those integrated into the regular classroom, which is a priority of the EMSB, will need the support of child care workers, psychologists, speech and language pathologists, etc. to function properly in an inclusive setting.

Inspirations: How much have the numbers of special needs students grown?

Lew Lewis: Going back seven years, even though the overall student population is decreasing, the proportion of handicapped students has grown. For example, in 2001 we had 40 autistic students and now we have 215. Some of this increase may be attributable to the fact that the definition of autism spectrum disorders has broadened to include high-functioning children, who in the past may not have been diagnosed as autistic, and some because more parents want their special needs children in an inclusive classroom setting.

Inspirations: What is the “ideal” in a perfect environment for special needs?

Lew Lewis: The “ideal” is always to move toward smaller classes, more resource teachers and a lower ratio of students to professionals.

graduate school at Northwestern where I got my Ph.D. I was top of my class with straight A's. I thoroughly enjoyed graduate school because the classes were small and research involved one on one contact with my professors so the hearing handicap was not a serious problem.”

In November 2004 Mayor Steinberg got cochlear implants. “The change has been miraculous,” he says. “By the time I got the implant, my hearing loss on the worse side was classified as profound, meaning I could hear but make out very little even with a powerful hearing aid. On the better side the loss was severe. I could no longer carry out a reasonable conversation on the phone. Today I can talk for hours and miss not much more than someone with normal hearing.

I needed infrared devices hooked to my hearing aids to watch movies and I still missed a lot. I no longer use any assistive devices at movies and miss not much more than someone with normal hearing. My wife is thrilled since it was very frustrating repeating everything. That is no longer necessary. However, a cochlear implant does not provide perfect hearing in all situations. Two or more people talking at the same time is very difficult. Any language other than English is close to impossible. However, overall my gains have been at the top of the scale and miraculous is the best one word description.”

William Steinberg is indeed an inspiration to anyone with a hearing impairment.

Conditions for greater success

Schools must offer a fulfilling and stimulating environment for everyone—including students with disabilities, their friends in regular classes, and teachers. However, providing special needs students with the conditions they need to achieve their full potential is a major challenge for schools.

The Action Plan to Promote Success for Students With Handicaps, Social Maladjustments or Learning Disabilities – Conditions for Greater Success, launched last June by the Québec government, sets out ways to provide better support for students, school staff, parents and school boards. Planned actions include the following:

- Lowering the number of students per class in Québec's most disadvantaged neighbourhoods, at the elementary and Secondary I levels
- Improving teacher training
- Helping school boards and school administrators diversify services
- Adding funding to provide occasional release time for teachers who have several students with special needs in their regular classes, to be used primarily for training and concerted action with other staff members to monitor their students
- Developing information tools for parents to allow them to play a role in the implementation of the plan for their child
- Providing access to a neutral student advocate who will examine and deal with complaints submitted to school boards, subject to the adoption of Bill 88 on democracy and school board governance

The Action Plan is designed to ensure the conditions that will allow all stakeholders to deal with the requirements of today's classrooms and students with widely varying needs. All of these measures will apply in addition to the existing measures for students with difficulties and in disadvantaged neighbourhoods.

The Action Plan contains 21 measures for greater success, which are described in more detail on the MELS Web site at www.mels.gouv.qc.ca.

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“Honestly, not well,” he admits. “My mother worked with me a lot at home on subjects that required hearing, especially spelling and French. Over the course of my academic career, I did better and better because I could rely on reading rather than listening. In Hampstead School the only accommodation that I got was that they did not fail me and that was solely because they knew my IQ and that the poor performance was due to the hearing handicap. In High School at West Hill I did much better but Oral French was almost impossible. I was given a 56 percent, with 50 being a passing grade at the time, so I could go to university but I probably deserved a 30 percent. At McGill I did well and in



Reverse Integration

— a life experience for mainstream students

By Clarise Samuels

At Mackay Centre School in N.D.G. every student is either physically disabled, deaf or has speech and language difficulties. In an interesting program called “reverse integration,” about 30 typical children from regular schools spend a year at Mackay to learn and socialize alongside disabled students. The school boasts small classes, a swimming program, a computer lab, a full-day pre-kindergarten and smartboards in every classroom. The atmosphere is cheerful and bright. Children with English eligibility from ages 4 to 11 may apply to be screened as prospective reverse integration (RI) students.

“We are not looking for straight-A students for the program,” remarked Patrizia Ciccarelli, who is in her first year as principal of both the Mackay Centre School and the Philip E. Layton School for the Blind. “They can be middle-of-the-road. They do have to be well-adjusted. I don’t expect the RI students never to get into trouble, but I can’t have RI students who always get into trouble.”

Some RI students are always eager to help their disabled classmates; some may let their disabled classmates fend for themselves—a lot like real life. But the RI students provide good role models for the disabled children. “The disabled kids are just like any children,” interjects Jacques Monfette, the school’s former principal who is now overseeing the English Montreal School Board’s alternative outreach high school system. “They want to keep up with



Pictured (left to right) are 2007-08 reverse integration students Camille Cockerton and Jade St-Pierre, along with Mackay student Georgia Beauchemin.

the culture. They watch the regular kids and learn the buzzwords, how to act cool, what music is being listened to—they want to know all of that.”

In gym class, teacher Bob Simpson puts able-bodied RI students in wheelchairs for sports events. “It levels the playing field and allows the regular kids to experience some

of the challenges that the disabled kids face all the time,” Simpson noted.

The RI students also motivate the Mackay students to do their best academically. The RI students get a normal curriculum while they attend Mackay, and they are assigned harder problems from the teachers and extra tutoring from volunteers to make

up for the slower pace of the classes. Schedules are juggled masterfully to ensure all the RI students have their curriculum needs met. The Mackay kids are influenced by the RI students and aspire to the higher levels being set by the regular kids in their classrooms.

“It’s a very nice environment,” said Camille Cockerton, who completed Grade 6 at Mackay last year. “The groups are small, and everyone is friendly.”

“I enjoyed it more than regular school,” commented Jade St-Pierre. “You get more attention for homework, there are so many activities, you get to help kids—it’s a good experience and an unbreakable bond. My best friend is a Mackay student. We will keep in touch.”

Many RI students stay in touch with their Mackay friends and never forget their experience at Mackay. The program is now over 30 years old, and one current Mackay teacher is a former RI student, and so is rock singer Jonas Tomalty.

“The reverse integration program is about encouraging potential in disabled kids,” said Monfette. “When you only see the potential, you don’t see the disability. The disability disappears.”

To find out how your child can become part of this experience please call 514-482-0500, ext. 218 or log on to

www.emsb.qc.ca/mackay
or
www.mackaycenter.org.

Quiet child comes into his own

I had the pleasure of teaching, or shall I say learning, from this wonderful young person with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) whom I shall refer to as CM. When he first came into the specialized class setting where I was teaching, his communication skills were limited to simple phrases. He had a number of sensory issues and spent the better part of recess facing away from the other children.

As the school year progressed, his personality began to make its way to the forefront. CM began interacting with his peers - telling jokes, chatting with friends and engaging in symbolic play. His academic skills soared, and he realized he actually enjoyed working with his hands and that getting them dirty was okay; he became quite the artist. I think the highlight of my three years with him was when CM stood in front of the entire school assembly and sang during our annual Christmas concert. He stood there facing his peers and teachers singing with confidence and gusto; this introverted and quiet child was coming into his own.

- Silvia Patella
Special Education Consultant
Complementary Services
Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board

The Sir Wilfrid Laurier School Board is the third largest English school board of the Province of Québec. Its territory comprises the administrative regions of Laval, Lanaudière, and the Laurentides, spanning over 35 000 square kilometers. The student popu-

lation is over 15 000 students, attending classes in 26 elementary schools and 10 secondary schools. For more information about its services for special needs students log on to www.swlauriersb.qc.ca or call 450 621-5600 or 1 866 621-5600.



**COMMISSION SCOLAIRE SIR-WILFRID-LAURIER
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Oppositional Defiant Disorder

A challenge for parents and teachers

By Lori Rubin

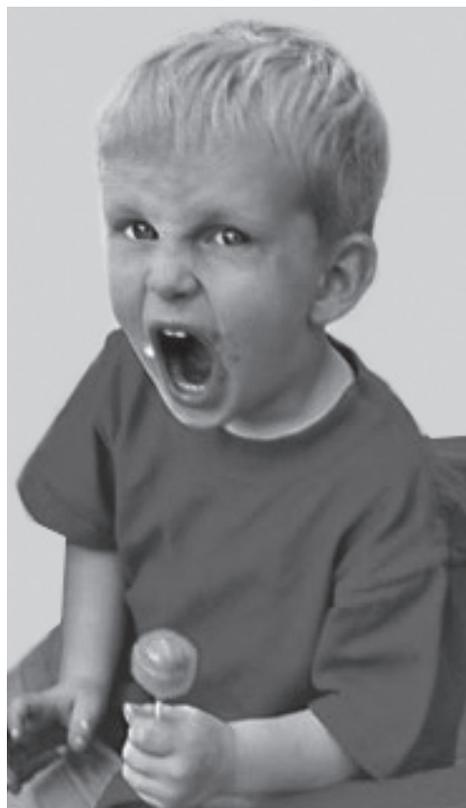


*"You say yes, I say no
you say stop, I say go go go"
-Hello Goodbye
(Lennon-McCartney, Oct. 1967)*

A student who has been diagnosed with Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD) brings some concerning behaviours into their classroom setting. Defined as, "a form of social aggression that includes a pattern of disobedient, negativistic, and provocative opposition to authority figures (www.healthscout.com)," ODD can rapidly turn a smoothly-functioning classroom or daycare activity, an enjoyable social outing, or a lively family meal, into complete pandemonium.

Seen as a precursor to the more extreme and long-lasting Conduct Disorder, symptoms of ODD may include: ongoing temper tantrums or "meltdowns," continuous arguing, defiance of rules, continual blaming of others, angry and resentful mood, spiteful and vindictive behaviour, and frequent use of obscene language. Although many individuals, especially children and youth between the ages of 10 and 15, exhibit some of these traits, it is the consistent, relentless manifestation of several of these traits, over an extended period of time, in a variety of settings (home, school, the community), that indicate a need to look into the matter more closely.

The diagnosis of ODD would involve a thorough family medical/behavioural/social history, a checklist for parents and teachers to fill out that would alert professionals to the frequency and severity of certain behaviours, in addition to a few periods of student observation at which time the observer takes note of defiant and oppositional behaviours. Once the formal assessment is completed, the psychiatrist and/or psychologist gathers all his/her data and can conclude whether or not the student does have Oppositional Defiant Disorder and if so, to what degree. Many experts agree that there is a strong co-morbidity (a high incidence of association between two or more independent disorders) between ODD and CD (Conduct Disorder)



Oppositional Defiant Disorder can, and often does, create havoc in a child's world.

and ADHD (Attention Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder). Individuals diagnosed with ODD usually have average or above-average intelligence and are often described as being creative and/or dynamic.

In terms of treatment, some cases of ODD resolve on their own without any formal treatment. This could happen as a result of student maturation or a change in the student's home or school environment. However, many students require well-thought out behaviour modification plans, tracers, small group or one-on-one counselling sessions, and anger management and relaxation techniques, in order to experience success at school. Teachers often benefit from learning how to use specific strategies that are designed to reduce the ongoing arguing and defiance that can negatively affect the classroom climate. Parenting programs to encourage effective behaviour management techniques can be extremely instrumental in bringing about positive change in the adult/child relationship. Medication prescribed by a physician or psychiatrist can play a role in reducing aggressive and impulsive tendencies.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder can, and

often does, create havoc in a child's world. Children with this disorder can alienate peers and adults who care about them, sabotage their learning experiences, and reduce their chances of success in personal endeavours. In getting the help they need, these individu-

als can go on to lead joyous and productive lives, one step at a time.

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

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Returning to the joy of reading even with learning difficulties

Despina Vassiliou

Many children with special needs often have difficulties with some aspect of reading, whether they have a learning disability, an intellectual impairment or autism. As parents the focus is usually on the mechanics of reading and being able to complete the homework every night. It is a challenge. However, there is more to reading than simply being able to read the words on the page. Through reading we learn new vocabulary words, how to communicate, spell, and write. When there are reading issues, reading can become a chore and children who struggle with reading too often become discouraged and lose interest. What they can sometimes benefit from is simply re-focusing reading to be more of interest and to experience the Joy of Reading.

A technique that may be helpful is to form a sort of book club that involves at least the child in question and the parent, and if possible the entire family. This book club may meet once a week, once or twice a month. The meeting could be set up as a social and special event where you may share



Through reading we learn new vocabulary words, how to communicate, spell, and write.

cookies and milk or have a special setting (e.g., a corner of a room with lots of pillows or a special tablecloth). You may also want to schedule it as part of a routine (e.g. every Saturday). However, most of the techniques described below can be used for any reading material as the ultimate goal is to further develop the child's reading comprehension skills.

When choosing a book, the important component is that the child (or children taking turns if it is more than one child that participates) has the control over the choice of book, whether it be a picture book, a comic book, or a novel beyond the child's reading ability. The goal is to allow the interest of the book to assist in engaging the child in the reading activity. Then the task is to determine how the book can be read. Each of you may read it independently, the parent may read it to the child, or the child can read it to the parent. Also you may need to determine how much will be read before you meet, whether it is a paragraph, page, or chapter. The amount to be read will depend on the child's reading ability if he or she will be reading it alone and the level of

the book. Keep in mind that the child may need to read (or have it read to him or her) more than once to facilitate the comprehension of the text.

Once part or all of the book has been read you may meet to have a discussion of the text. The discussion should encompass the 5W questions: Who? What? Where? When? Why? More of the focus should go on the deeper questions than simply on the ones that ask "What colour was the boy's shirt?" but more on "Why do you think that happened?" and "What do you think will happen next? Why do you think that?" and "What else would you like to learn about?" Such questions are likely to inspire the child to want to learn more. The importance of this task is to have the child think and reflect about what was read in order to gain interest, information, vocabulary, knowledge, and exposure to written material. Reading should not simply be a chore but redefined as an adventure for our little ones to inspire them to want to learn and do more with books.

Despina Vassiliou is a school psychologist at the English Montreal School Board.

REACH

Realistic Educational Alternatives for Children with Handicaps
A School of the Riverside School Board



REACH is a school of the Riverside School Board, located in Saint Lambert, Quebec. It is the only English school on the South Shore that specializes in educating children with special needs.

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- Programs to facilitate integration into the community
- Occupational Therapy and language development programs

**For more information about REACH please contact,
Caryn Shacter – Principal (450) 671-1649, cshacter@rsb.qc.ca**



Yaldei Developmental Centre offers early childhood intervention program

By Valeria Nekhim

Most children grow and develop according to schedule, but as is the case with almost everything, there are exceptions. Every year, children with special needs such as autism, developmental delays and neurological disorders are born into this world. When the parents of these children notice that there is a problem they immediately go out in search of help, only to find themselves on waiting lists, or at best receiving an hour or two of services a week. This is where the Donald Berman Yaldei Developmental Centre comes in.

Yaldei is the only facility of its kind in Quebec to offer an intensive early childhood intervention program for children with special needs. Founded in 1997 by parents of two developmentally delayed children, Yaldei works to help children live as independently and productively as possible. "If therapy is started during a child's early years, it really affects their ability to grow and develop," said Yaldei administrator Ayala Conway.

The carefully selected staff at Yaldei



Students like Fil get a lot of personal attention at Yaldei.

consists of educators, occupational therapists, speech therapists, physiotherapists, massage and music therapists and the list goes on. Prior to receiving any of these therapies, the child undergoes a comprehensive evaluation, followed by a custom made treatment plan. Some children must come every weekday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., while others need only to come once or twice a week.

The children often receive a combination of therapies, all of which are conducted one on one. Always on the brink of new research, Yaldei uses the latest therapies and methods in order to help the children reach their full potential, which is ultimately to go to school and to be involved in their communities.

In order to facilitate this, Yaldei has a school integration program. Through this program,

(continued on page 10)

Paul VI High School



**9905 ave Papineau
Montreal, QC H2B**

Paul VI is an alternative high school providing quality educational programs to students from 13 to 21 years of age who have been diagnosed with learning difficulties. Since its founding in 1979, Paul VI has offered a unique opportunity to students who find the regular high school setting inappropriate.

The school welcomes students from various boards, both on and off the island of Montreal. It offers Individual Paths for Learning (IPL) for students in the following categories: moderately intellectually handicapped, mildly intellectually handicapped, severely learning disabled and multiple handicapped.

Students are grouped on the basis of their language, math, and social abilities, as well as their emotional maturity. Within these small groups, a holistic approach contributes to student growth. Student success is maximized through personalized instruction, computer-assisted modules and a variety of extracurricular activities.

A model workshop area is incorporated within the school as a preparatory phase for students who cannot immediately enter the Work Study Program. Students in these programs receive "on-the-job" experience and are closely supervised by school personnel. Meanwhile, students in the Work Study Program receive actual on-the-job training four days a week. The fifth day is devoted to in-school follow up and remediation by a work study teacher. For students who are not yet ready for a four-day-per-week commitment, a one, two or three-day program is arranged.

For more information call (514) 723-2845 or log on to www.emsb.qc.ca/paulvi



(Continued from page 9)

children who are deemed ready will be integrated into the daycare or elementary school environment with the help of a Yaldei educator. "Whenever they can be integrated into regular school, we integrate them as soon as possible," said founder and director of Yaldei, Menachem Leifer.

For some children this takes longer than for others, and in certain cases integration into the mainstream school system isn't possible, meaning the children will have to go to a school for special needs.

"Our goal is to fulfill whatever potential they have," stated Ms Conway. "We want to put them on whatever road we can to help them live productively and be part of society, not just to live on the sidelines."

Although Yaldei has been recognized as a leader in intensive early intervention, the centre does not receive any funding from the Quebec government. As a result they must rely on fundraising and tuition fees which can be as much as \$55,000 per year for children requiring intensive intervention. Since this is too much for most parents, Yaldei has a subsidy fund for families who qualify.

"The government should make early intervention available to everyone. It's not fair that parents, who have so many additional financial and emotional burdens as it is, should have to pay for this therapy. It's not a privilege; it is a necessity," said Mr.

Leifer. "

"What's ironic is that it's more cost effective for the government in the long run to invest in early intervention, because the care of the child whose needs haven't been met will be greater as they get older," adds Ben Baer, Yaldei's clinical director.

Apart from its early intervention program, Yaldei offers services to children who attend regular school, but who are having trouble coping in a mainstream setting for whatever reason. "They come to us and they quickly improve their cognitive skills, social skills, self regulating skills and as a result they are better able to participate in a classroom," said Mr. Baer.

Yaldei also has a summer day camp program, as well as a sleep away camp for those ages four and up. "They learn daily life

and social skills at camp that they might not otherwise gain in a school setting because it's a different environment. It also gives a much needed respite for parents," Mr. Leifer explained

For Mr. Leifer, seeing a child walk or

talk after their parents have been told their child will never be able to, can only be compared to "witnessing the miracle of creation all over again." Now that's something.

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The Learning Associates of Montreal

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St. Raphael Centre (Elementary and High School)

Offering blend of psychosocial, behavioural and educational programs for students with behavioural difficulties

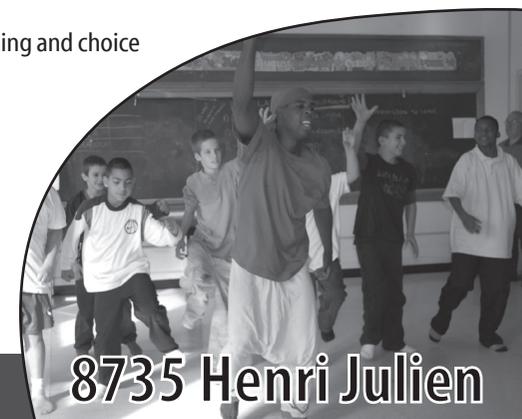
St. Raphael High School, located on the corner of Henri Julien and Crémazie, offers a psycho-educational program - a blend of psychosocial, behavioural and educational programs - for students with behavioural difficulties as classified by the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sports. The philosophy and mission of the psycho-educational program is twofold:

- Students take responsibility for their choices.
- Stress the importance of personal responsibilities, problem-solving techniques, confidence building and self-acceptance.

Admission to St. Raphael High School is by referral. A complete referral package must be obtained from the sending school. Referrals should be made no later than May for admission the following September. A multi-disciplinary team will review each applicant's suitability for the program.

Programs

- Highly structured program based on behaviour modification, incorporating a successful well-adapted behaviour point system, social skills training and choice therapy.
- MDT (Multi-Disciplinary Team) approach, using a cross-section of teaching and non-teaching professionals.
- IEP (Individual Education Plan) documents the student's behavioural progress, academic progress and psycho-educational history.
- Ongoing parental involvement.
- Student-centered learning approach.
- Services of a psychologist and a special education technician to help students with the choice therapy program.
- ART (Aggression Replacement Training) teaches techniques and strategies to deal with anger before it leads to swearing and violence.
- ICT program which compliments the regular core program while teaching research skills and presentation techniques.



For more information call (514) 381-0811 or log on to www.emsb.qc.ca/straphael

8735 Henri Julien



Y Cycle for Special Needs



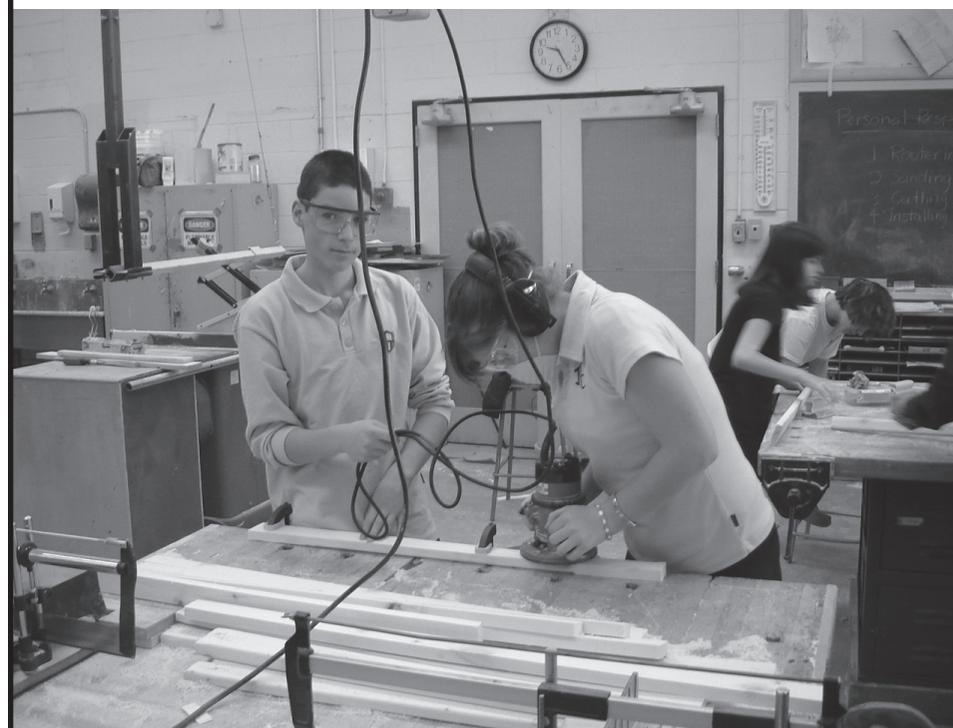
The YM-YWHA Montreal Jewish Community Centres offers a wide range of programs for individuals with special needs, from children to adults. Above is a group of teens who are part of the Kouleinu program sponsored by the **Y Cycle for Special Needs**. Using one to one specialized support services, trained and qualified leisure buddies accompany and assist these teens in using the athletic and fitness services at the Y. Other programs include after-school fitness and leisure programs for 12 to 18 year olds, Sunday Fun in the gym and special needs swim for individuals 16-25 years old. The YM-YWHA is located at 5400 Westbury Ave., in Cote des Neiges. For more information, call *Jim Owens, 514-737-6551 ext. 235.*

Find out more about

John Grant High School

John Grant High School, an alternative special education vocational centre, is devoted to the needs of students with learning difficulties and offers a warm, supportive, multicultural environment and small class sizes. The school's goals vary according to the ability of the students involved: to remediate academic weaknesses and promote entry into the regular work force via extensive vocational and work study programs. We enable students with academic promise to achieve matriculation level credits and pursue further education in the Adult Education Sector. Several of our programs prepare students for independent living.

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Physically disabled student happy with Dawson College experience

By Stuart Nulman

Panagiota Boussis is an adult student who attends Marymount Adult Centre's Centre d'Activites Recreatives et Educatives (C.A.R.E.) continuing education program, which focuses on enhancing the lives of adults with severe physical disabilities. Panagiota, who is in her 40s, speaks with a non-verbal communication system, and has recently started to use a personal computer and head mouse so that she can communicate with a wider circle of people.

These personal challenges haven't stopped Panagiota, and recently, she successfully faced another challenge in her quest to continue her education. She completed a Psychology course at Dawson College, attending twice a week with an attendant from Dawson's Centre for



Students with Disabilities.

Panagiota admits that at first, she was a little nervous about going to school at Dawson, and in fact, her parents were quite surprised about her decision, too. "They were surprised to hear that I wanted to go back to school, but now they're very happy for me and very supportive," she said. "Returning to school was something that I wanted to do. After experiencing it, I want to go to more classes, because it's a different thing for me, and I felt I needed a change in my life."

As for learning psychology at Dawson, Panagiota says she already had some familiarity with the subject as a result of what she learned in classes she took at C.A.R.E., which is based at the Shadd Business Centre facility in N.D.G. Dawson allowed her extra time to do her assignments, which she accomplished with the help of Noelle, an aide who works with wheelchair-bound students at Dawson and whom Panagiota knew when she worked at C.A.R.E.

Panagiota strongly encourages any of her C.A.R.E. classmates who want to pursue studies in psychology to take the class at Dawson. "It gives you the chance to learn different things," she said.



Panagiota Boussis is excited about her studies at Dawson College.

Dealing with spina bifida

One teen, one disability, one great attitude!

Alexis Boyer is an average 18-year-old, Grade 11 student, except for one thing. Alexis has spina bifida and hydrocephalus. But he doesn't let this hold him back. His motto: hold on because it's a wild ride!

According to Alexis' pediatrician at the Montreal Children's Hospital, Dr. Patricia Forbes, spina bifida is a neural tube birth defect that results in the vertebrae of the spinal column not developing properly. "This causes damage to the spinal cord resulting in varying degrees of paralysis to the lower limbs. Hydrocephalus is the excessive accumulation of cerebrospinal fluid within the brain."

Treatment for spina bifida involves surgery and physiotherapy. Many people need mobility supports such as braces, crutches, or wheelchairs. Treatment for hydrocephalus

usually involves surgically implanting a flexible tube (a shunt) into the brain ventricles to drain away excess cerebrospinal fluid.

usually involves surgically implanting a flexible tube (a shunt) into the brain ventricles to drain away excess cerebrospinal fluid. "not a shopper!" "Because Alexis has three siblings he has always been challenged to keep up with them," says Alexis' mom Nicole. "I think this has helped Alexis push himself beyond what may be expected with people born with spina bifida." According to Nicole, he's just an average teen boy.

Alexis will tell you that he sure is. He doesn't like school, he's pretty lazy, and he likes hockey, hunting, and fishing.

On the hockey rink Alexis plays left wing, and he confesses to being the best left-winger on his team. Every Sunday during the winter and spring he plays hockey designed for kids with disabilities. Each team member sits with legs straight out in a hockey sledge (a type of sled 6 inches from the ice with blades on the bottom) and holds two hockey sticks with metal picks at the ends to help propel them.

Everything else is the same as regular hockey, from the rules to the parents shouting in the stands.

At the present time, the specific cause of spina bifida is not known. There is a genetic component and folic acid deficiency plays a role. Ongoing therapy, medical care and/or surgical

treatments are necessary to help prevent and manage complications throughout an individual's life. But just 40 years ago, only 10 per cent of babies born with spina bifida survived their first year. Today with research and advances in medical technology, 90 per cent survive and thrive, like Alexis.

And Alexis has no plans to slow down anytime soon. "I plan to eventually go to CEGEP and take agriculture or pursue animal sciences," he says. "And next winter I will start adaptive downhill skiing..." As his "wild ride" continues...



Alexis Boyer

cal treatments are necessary to help prevent and manage complications throughout an individual's life. But just 40 years ago, only 10 per cent of babies born with spina bifida survived their first year. Today with research and advances in medical technology, 90 per cent survive and thrive, like Alexis.

Alexis does not need to use a wheelchair but he does wear braces from his feet to his knees. And since birth he has undergone 13 surgeries. In the first months of his life alone, he had surgery to close the base of his spinal column and surgery to insert a shunt in his brain.

"I have gotten used to being handicapped," says Alexis. "I feel I am able to adapt to any situation. I can't do long-distance walking, but that's okay because I'm



Hearing impaired babies: a personal story

By Hema Patel

The birth of a child is one of the greatest miracles in life. And I, like most new mothers, was absolutely delighted with my newborn baby. In his first few months of life, I did all that I knew was good and right for our child – good food, warm shelter, vaccines and car seats.

I sang songs into his little ears, read stories and told him what a joy he was in our lives. To be honest, we wondered about his hearing from time to time. We asked his doctor about it, but when the little bell rang behind his head, he turned to the sound immediately. I wondered if I was simply an over anxious first time mother. So imagine my shock, one unforgettable spring day, when I was told that my little baby was deaf. Not a little deaf, but profoundly so.

He had not heard a single sound in our home, in our lives. Not the sound of my voice, not the sound of piano, not the sound of his own voice. I remember hearing him laugh in his crib and wondering whether his deafness would swallow up his voice, whether I would hear that laugh again. And I realized too that I knew so very little about deafness, and was stunned to learn that it is the most common congenital abnormality in newborns.

In short order, I learned that:

Most hearing impaired babies are born to hearing parents.

That doctors can't tell whether a baby can hear or not by ringing a bell; oftentimes the baby will turn because they sense a movement or see a shadow.

The best way to identify hearing loss in newborns is through universal newborn hearing screening (UNHS) where an easy 10 minute sound test (otoacoustic emission test - OAE) can accurately determine if a baby can hear or not, before they leave the nursery.

When hearing loss is detected at birth, early intervention with therapy and technological aids, like hearing aids and cochlear implants, allow even profoundly deaf children to hear and speak normally.

We were fortunate to have the strong support of our families and access to up-to-date medical information. At the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf, one of Canada's leading programs for hearing impaired children, our son has received excellent care from their expert team. He hears and speaks, in English and French.

Because Quebec has no universal hear-

ing screening program, most children with hearing loss are identified late, when they present with significant speech and language delays. Most parents don't find out that their child is hearing impaired until after the age of two years.

Would we let a child be blind for two years if we knew that there was a way to let him see shortly after birth? Would we let a child be paralyzed for two years or more if we knew of a way to restore strength to the muscles? But here in Quebec, we are allowing our hearing impaired children to stay in silence even though we have the means to test hearing right after birth and have the tools to help infants hear.

Universal newborn hearing screening (UNHS), costing approximately \$35 per newborn, is both effective and cost-effective. It is available in most provinces in Canada, including Ontario, now celebrating its 6th year of UNHS. Quebec's own team of experts have strongly recommended immediate implementation of UNHS.

Our children deserve all the advantages that other Canadian infants already have. Join with our Coalition for UNHS in asking the health minister to implement UNHS province-wide, without delay.

What can you do?

Ask your doctor about the OAE test for your baby.

Talk to family and friends about the importance of hearing screening in newborns.

Call your MLA and ask that they support UNHS.

Join our Coalition for UNHS; visit our website at www.coalition-UNHS.com.

Dr. Hema Patel is a pediatrician at the Montreal Children's Hospital and director of ambulatory care.

Together we can, make a difference!

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Are you concerned about your child's hearing?

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- May leave out plurals and verb tense markers
- May have difficulty hearing in noisy situations
- May have frequent ear infections.



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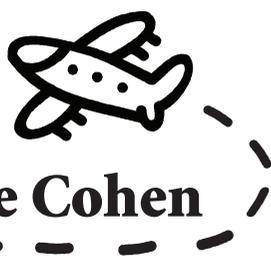
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Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen



Vancouver: one of the most accessible cities in the world

Olympic fever has hit the city of Vancouver. And why not? The Winter Olympic Games will take place here and in Whistler February 12 to 28, 2010 followed by the Paralympic Winter Games for athletes with disabilities March 12 to 21, 2010. Everywhere you go there is a reminder of this. It is estimated that the games will be attended by 2.3 million people and include 5,000 athletes and officials, 10,000 media and 14,000 volunteers. Vancouver (www.tourismvancouver.com) is the largest city in the province of British Columbia.

First ever disabled Mayor



Mayor Sam Sullivan

Vancouver enjoys a reputation as being one of the most accessible cities in the world among travelers with special needs. Whether using wheelchairs, white canes, seeing eye dogs or hearing aids, Vancouver leads the way in making the area a more livable place for people with disabilities through its progressive transportation systems, innovative housing and recreational opportunities. It is perhaps no coincidence that Vancouver also happens to have Canada's first-ever disabled mayor. Sam Sullivan, whose three year mandate ends in November, was paralyzed from the waist down after a skiing accident at the age of 19. This left him as what is called a C 4/5 quadriplegic, meaning his injury occurred high enough on his spinal column to qualify him as a quadriplegic—but low enough that he retained some use of his hands (he can still write, drive and use the telephone.) He

is the founder of six non-profit organizations that have improved the lives of thousands of North Americans with disabilities, including the Tetra Society, which recruits technically-skilled volunteers to create assistive devices for people with disabilities (30 chapters throughout North America), and the Disabled Sailing Association which provides opportunities for people with disabilities to sail (20 chapters in North America). He is an avid sailor, and also enjoys hiking using an assistive device he co-invented called the TrailRider, a one-wheeled vehicle that enables people with disabilities to travel and participate in hiking/camping trips and is in use throughout North America.

"People are disabled by the barriers and obstacles in their lives," Sullivan told Inspirations in an interview. "What I have worked to do is remove those barriers, so that a person's physical impairment is not so disabling."

In 1993 Sullivan was elected to Vancouver city council. Twelve years later he became mayor. His role as the flag bearer at the closing ceremony of the 2006 Winter Olympics in Torino, Italy was viewed by an audience around the globe. As mayor he was involved in the city's planning for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games. This includes the construction of over \$100 million for venues and the Olympic Village in Southeast False Creek – the largest and greenest housing development in North America.

Paralympic Flag Given Prominence

In our interview, Mayor Sullivan lamented that he will not be at the helm when the Olympics take place. He failed to win the nomination from his party to seek a second term in office. Nonetheless, when the Olympics and Paralympics take place he will be an interested observer. Since the Games were awarded to Vancouver he has had the Paralympic flag fly at the same height as the Olympic flag, something that was followed at the provincial legislature. Given his disposition, he appreciates the fact there is such a strong Paralympic movement. "I hope that some of the things I did and advocated for will result in the Paralympics gaining a higher profile here," he said.

Does Mayor Sullivan see himself as

an "Inspiration" to other individuals with disabilities? "I hope I can somehow inspire people to look at getting on with things and experiencing much more full and active lives," he responded.

Mayor Sullivan also refuses to take credit for Vancouver's excellent

reputation of dealing with people who have special needs. "Some people do say that Vancouver is successful in this area because they have a disabled mayor," he said. "The opposite is true. We have a disabled mayor because Vancouver is so accessible. So many people have worked hard to make this a reality. I am just one of the beneficiaries."

Effective Transportation System

Among travellers with disabilities, Vancouver boasts an effective transportation system, innovative housing and recreational opportunities.



A view of the Pacific Ocean

For example, as one of the most barrier-free airports in the world, the Vancouver International Airport exceeds the national and provincial Building Code standards for people with hearing, visual or mobility impairments. The airport's terminal features include: ticket and service counters with amplified hand-sets; low-mounted flight information monitors designed for easier viewing with high-contrast typeface; visual paging monitors and public address systems displayed in written form; information kiosks equipped with closed-captioned decoders; tactile guidance maps of the terminal building; accessible public telephones and services for the deaf; and accessible washrooms; facilities for service dogs are to be built in the near future.

The mayor is particularly proud of the role he played in creating a new entrance to the Granville Street SkyTrain station on September 22, 2006, making this previously inaccessible station accessible for disabled patrons. Nonetheless he is quick to point out that he wishes to consider himself as "the mayor for everyone" adding "the beauty about Vancouver is that we have very capable advocates. One of the laments of the disability movement is that as we become more successful we lose our leadership. Forty or

50 years ago the world was not as accessible to individuals such as I. Therefore, at that time I probably would have been forced into a leading advocacy role. But that is not the case for myself or many others in my position. We have been allowed to follow our dreams."

In 1990, Vancouver became the first city in Canada to provide scheduled bus service to people with disabilities. There's also a free wheelchair-accessible trolley ride around Stanley Park, (604.801.5515).

Accommodations

There are more than 24,000 rooms in Greater Vancouver and more than 13,000 in the downtown core. While the average rate is just over \$120, rooms can go for as little as \$60 or more than \$1,000 a night. The best hotel deals are offered October through April. The Rosedale on Robson (www.rosedaleonrobson.com) is located in an excellent area and is consistently improving its services for special needs guests.

As historic Yaletown's only all suite hotel, the Rosedale offers one and two bedroom suites for the price of a conventional hotel room. You can choose from an array of suites with two double beds or a queen. The suites offer the comforts of home with fully equipped galley kitchens. For the businessperson, you can access high speed internet WiFi as well as ample workspace. If you need time to relax, head to the indoor swimming pool or the second floor garden terrace. For the fitness minded, there is an exercise area and equipment is at your disposal.

Handicapped rooms are available, pets are welcome (pet-free floors are also available), and the hotel is completely non-smoking. The fact that WorkSafe B.C (the workmen's compensation board) uses the hotel for its staff has provided General Manager James Miller, a native of Montreal, with some excellent in-house advisors where catering to special needs guests is concerned. "The people from WorkSafe B.C. have certainly sensitized us to some of the things that will make things easier for our special needs guests," Miller said. "Something as simple as our door sills being too thick for wheelchairs to get over. We will be installing some roll-in showers and special railings as well."

The hotel offers complimentary coffee, tea, hot chocolate and freshly baked goods every morning in "Goody's" from 6:30-9:30 a.m. Rosie's on Robson Restaurant and Pub is very popular among locals stopping by for dinner before enjoying a night out at the theatre, concert, or a hockey game. Unique to the Rosedale on Robson is their event desk, which offers popular sports, theatre and concert packages. Other features include secure underground parking with in/out privileges,

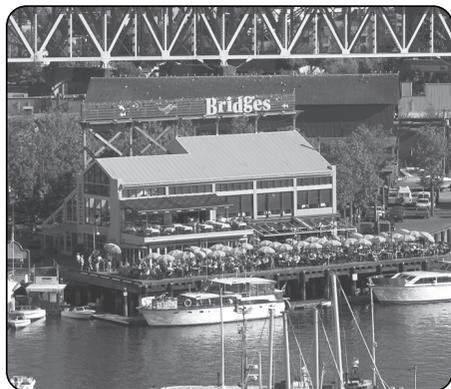


valet parking, and safety deposit boxes. Just steps away from the symphony, opera and live theatre, nearby venues include the Queen Elizabeth Theatre, Vancouver Playhouse, Centre For Performing Arts, and the Orpheum and Vogue Theatres. Sports enthusiasts can walk to GM Place, home of the Vancouver Canucks, and BC Place, home of the BC Lions. Close by are Granville Island, Chinatown, Kitsilano, English Bay, Stanley Park, Capilano Suspension Bridge, Grouse Mountain, Edgewater Casino, Vancouver Art Gallery, Telus World of Science, golf courses, and beautiful beaches.

World of Science

When I told people I was going to Vancouver, those who have been there before insisted we make time to visit TELUS World of Science and Science World (www.scienceworld.bc.ca), located at 1455 Quebec Street across the street from the Main Street/Science World Skytrain station. It features hundreds of interactive exhibits in five galleries. One involves a simulated wheelchair race where you get to test your upper body strength. Racing a wheelchair, we discover, requires you to use many muscles. Here we also learn about wheelchair posture. Racing wheelchairs, it turns out, can reach speeds of 32 km per hour on a flat course. Science World is handicapped accessible, with ramps leading to each level. Communications Coordinator Pamela Findling told me that there are many volunteers throughout the Centre with special needs, one of whom is blind.

Science World's exhibits are designed to engage and entertain a broad spectrum of people, from toddlers to senior citizens. Younger children may find a gallery like Kidspace most interesting, whereas adults might have more fun in a gallery like BodyWorks. Is my face symmetrical? What will I look like in 30 years? Where did I come from? These are just a few of the questions that the BodyWorks gallery has explored this year, allowing visitors to get a peek into what our bodies look like with powerful, interactive stations where they can stretch a rope out to see how long intestines



Bridges Restaurant

are, capture their face on camera and watch themselves age and use their powers of observation to try to read facial expressions correctly.

For a mere \$5 extra, you can enjoy an Imax film in one of the world's largest dome screens and a sensational wrap-around digital sound system. We saw the film *The Alps*, which captures the incredible true story of a mountaineer on a personal journey to make peace with the mountain that killed his father.

Playland Amusement Park

I always like to check out amusement parks. Located on the site of Vancouver's Pacific National Exhibition (www.pne.ca) on East Hastings Street, 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. 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 thrillseekers annually. Now I must confess that I normally avoid rollercoasters. Nonetheless, I convinced my family to wait in line for a half hour. That first drop was incredibly frightening, but a major rush at the same time. I am glad I did it. Ditto for the flume, in which we all got soaked to the skin. Other popular rides include the wild mouse, hell's gate, wave swinger, crazy beach party, the corkscrew, rock climbing, the hellevator, the pirate ship and music express. The "Kids Playce" has a variety of tamer rides, including the merry-go-round, KC's Raceway, dune buggies, the super slide, Pirate adventure, elephants, helicopters 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. Special needs individuals in wheelchairs can enter rides via the exit gate to avoid the lineup and to be placed on properly.

Cultus Lake Waterpark

Cultus Lake Waterpark (www.cultus.com) is the leader in the waterpark industry on the West Coast. Whether you are on vacation or just taking a much needed break, watersliding is a great recreational activity. This is a family oriented park, providing guests with rides for all ages. For thrill seekers there are some extreme waterslides. Open Victoria Day to Labour Day, I spent the day there with my family. It was a one hour and 20 minute drive from down-

town Vancouver to Chilliwack, but well worth the trip. There are pathways throughout for anyone in wheelchairs. The visually impaired can go on any rides, as long as they are accompanied by someone else. Autistic children generally enjoy water parks. But as my colleague Tania Piperni points out, she only recommends them for a child who



Cultus Lake Waterpark

would not be overstimulated by the environment.

At Cultus Lake I strongly recommend the new Colossal Canyon, a family raft ride that is like no other. Our family went on this twice. It is quite a thriller. The same goes for the Valley of Fear, which includes one incredible drop that has you experiencing panic and a thrill at the same time. The 72 foot free fall and speed slide has you moving at a rapid pace. There are three other slides which are much tamer. For little ones, a much more sedate area exists. I found the adventure river, in which you travel in a circle on a small tube, very relaxing. The two large hot tubs indeed warm you up. Cultus Lake is full of greenspace. You can find shade under trees or rent an umbrella. It is a great way to spend a warm summer day.

Theatre Under the Stars

If you are planning a summer visit to Vancouver, then you must include Theatre Under the Stars (www.tuts.ca) at the Malkin Bowl. The program's best of Broadway musicals have been delighting audiences in Stanley Park since 1940. Every July and August they present two wonderful productions on alternating nights. Last summer Jesus Christ Superstar and Annie Get Your Gun were on the stage. My family and I saw the former, purchasing our tickets online at www.ticketstonight.ca. This was a convenient choice since we were able to print them off the computer and avoid any lineups the night of the show. We got there a bit early and grabbed a light bite to eat in their small concession stand. Reserved tickets are \$36 for adults and \$34 for children versus \$31 and \$29 for general admission. We really enjoyed the experience of watching theatre "under the stars." Here is a tip. Bring insect repellent so the flies don't get to you. Stay tuned to their website to see what pro-

ductions are planned for 2009. The Malkin Bowl is fully handicapped accessible.

Dining Out

In terms of dining recommendations, make sure to include Bridges (www.bridgesrestaurant.com) and the Mill Marine Bistro (www.millbistro.ca) in your planning. 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. On the evening my party dined there we were seated on the patio. Our party shared some appetizers: hot garlic prawns, the tuna duo and the sweet red pepper and spinach dish. We enjoyed their salad and then sampled the crab and halibut cake burger, the fresh halibut fish and chips, their signature smoked wild salmon pizza and their grilled wild BC sockeye salmon. For dessert we left room for the tiramisu, chocolate mousse cake and a ice cream sundae for the delighted child at the table. The patio and main floor are completely handicapped accessible.

As for the Mill, this is among the properties of 34 year old Daniel Frankel, who is already a veteran in the Vancouver hospitality business. As president, CEO and founder of the Daniel Hospitality Group, he and his management company oversee a growing number of operations, including the Stanley Park Pavilion, Stanley's Parks Bar and Grill, the Prospect Point Lookout Complex in Stanley Park, the Mill Marine Bistro and Bar, the Mill Dock, Delilah's Restaurant and Martini Bar, the Coal Harbour Café & Catering Operations and Danny's Dogs & Shakes. He built the Mill from scratch in 2003. This place truly epitomizes the west coast casual dining scene, smack on the waterfront in Coal Harbour, overlooking the north shore mountains. Try the original Mill nachos, edamame (Japanese soy beans in the pod with rock salt), a big salad, the Lotsa Lox pizza, the BC Salmon Burger and some superb pastas. The Mill does have handicapped access, with ramps by their east and west side entrances.

Mike Cohen is the communications and marketing specialist for the English Montreal School Board and a Montreal writer. His email address is mcohen@emsb.qc.ca. Log on to his travel advice columns at www.sandboxworld.com/travel.



The Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development



The Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development, operated by the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), is a part of the Inclusive Education Service (IES) which is a provincial service designed to offer support and expertise to the English sector for the organization of programs and adapted teaching for students with special learning needs. The IES is funded and mandated by the Ministry of Education, Leisure and Sport (MELS).

The Mandate of this Centre is to provide:

- Support to Schools and School Boards
- Continuous Professional Development
- Research and Development Activities
- Contribution to the Development of Provincial Expertise

The Objective of the Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development is to provide:

English school boards throughout Quebec with the benefit of our vast amount of knowledge, experience and expertise in the areas of speech and language development, and to provide students with speech and language difficulties the opportunity to reach their potential.

Our Menu of Services:

- Resource Information Centre at the EMSB

Individuals can become acquainted with relevant resource materials, current journals, books, speech and language therapy materials, and assessment protocols.

- Consultation Services

We are available for consultation via telephone, e-mail, etc. Meetings for small groups or individuals can be held regarding specific topics related to speech and language development. We are open to host other schools/school boards who wish to visit our Centre or EMSB schools where specific speech and language programs are being carried out. In addition, we offer on-site support to school boards throughout the province.

- 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.

We provide workshops and conferences relevant to speech and language development for interested participants.

How to reach us:

The Centre of Excellence for Speech
and Language Development

English Montreal School Board
6000 Fielding Avenue
Montreal, Quebec
H3X 1T4



In order to access any of the services listed in this brochure, please contact:

Centre of Excellence Coordinator
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