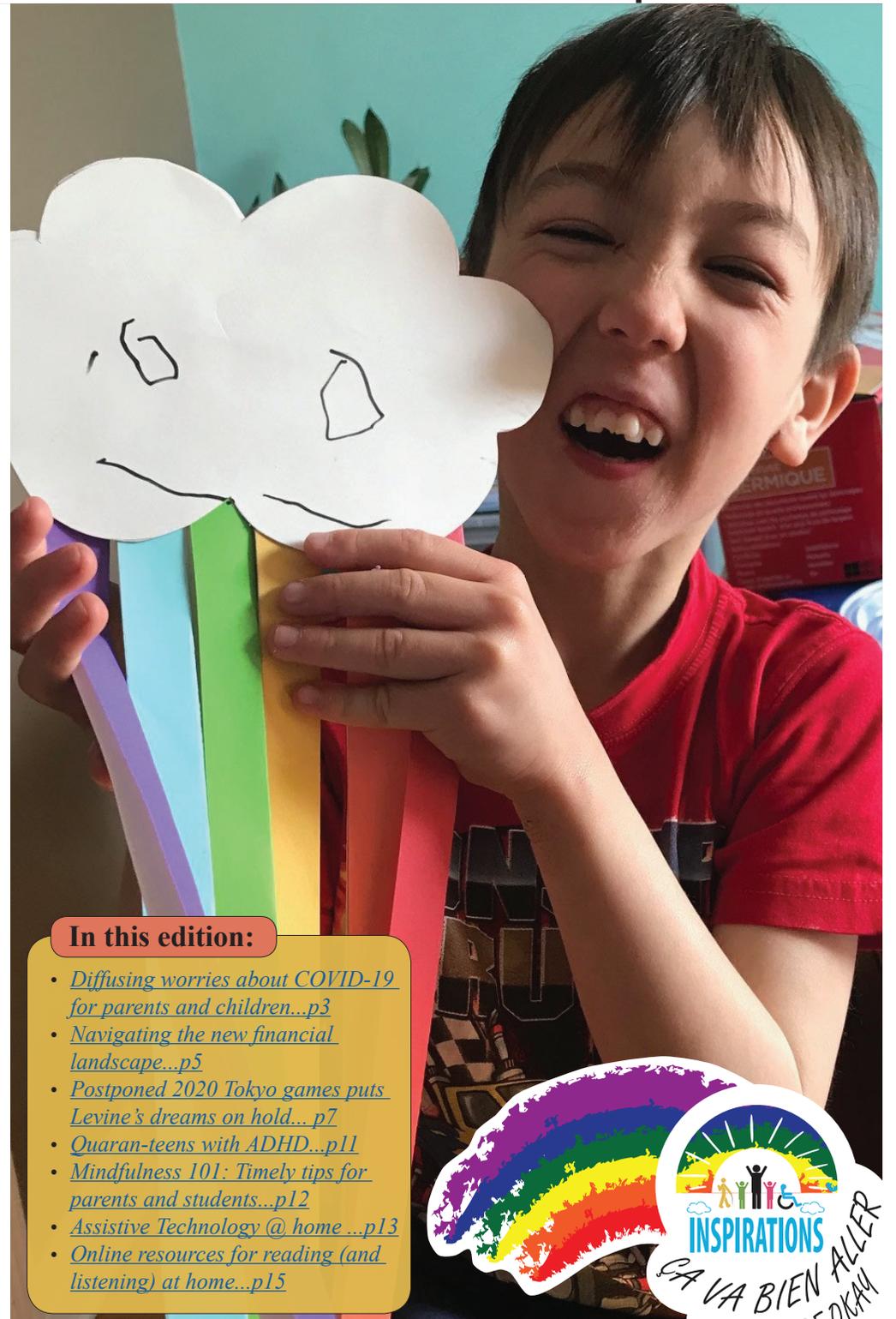


# INSPIRATIONS

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Eva Kratinova, who now lives in the Czech Republic, is a former member and proud follower of the West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped. (Photo, WIAIH)

Kai, a student at Mackay Centre School, shares his rainbow artwork. (Photo, Mackay Centre School)





## Message from the Editor



Dear Readers,

The COVID-19 pandemic has changed all of our lives in recent months. Normally at this time of year we are preparing to publish our large Spring/Summer print edition of *Inspirations*. That will be coming your way by June. Thanks to the exceptional talent we have to draw from in our contributors, we are pleased to share with you some timely information on how our special needs community is responding, and how families can adapt to this crisis. As of this writing, elementary schools will reopen in the Greater Montreal area on May 19. Attendance will be voluntary. Stay tuned to our website for updated information.

Happy reading!

Mike Cohen  
Editor



## INSPIRATIONS

Inspirations

The impact of COVID-19: Special Edition is produced by the Communications and Marketing Division and the Student Services Department of the English Montreal School Board

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## Quebec schools closed but EMSB educational websites are open and enlightening

Reviewed by Elaine Cohen

While the COVID-19 virus continues to wreak havoc throughout the world, English Montreal School Board (EMSB) educational consultants and professionals have worked in tandem to create websites and continuously maintain multifaceted resources to guide parents and their children at all levels of pre-school, kindergarten, elementary and secondary school.

Parents and guardians of children with special needs benefit from a treasure trove of relevant tips, tools and interactive activities that focus on diverse needs. Take note of the orange rectangle and simply click to connect with LD (Learning Disabilities) strategies. For starters a Q&A section points out teaching concerns related to reading and communication. In one instance a teacher alludes to blending phonemes, distinct units of sound that distinguish one word from another. Parents learn that some children begin recognizing sound-symbol patterns through exposure to books but others profit from instruction. Parents are provided with links to enjoyable games that support the task.

Similarly, older students glean strategies from links to improve reading comprehension.

For tips on English literacy, click the QRC (Quebec Reading Connection) website.

April is Autism Awareness Month; therefore, it's an opportune time to salute organizations devoted to autism and seek knowledge from sites such as Autism Speaks Canada and other notable listings.

In addition, visit the site that zooms in on complementary activities for children with special needs. The Occupational Therapy (OT) section is particularly impressive. It features practical activities to boost fine motor skills that people rely on for eating, playing and learning to write. Fundamental to becoming efficient writers, children start with developing hand muscles and eye-hand coordination skills. Besides offering a host of OT activities that apply to fine as well as gross motor needs, readers can access printable charts. Check out the interactive Sensory Guide to Breathing, which aims to calm the mind and body - a welcome component during these challenging times.

A not-to-be missed English literacy (reading) site is Mrs. P's Magic Library. The

award-winning free interactive digital storybook destination brings classic children's stories to life. TV star Kathy Kinney as Mrs. P. invites children to grab a book and give her a click! Her playlist includes famous bunny tales, magic library fun activities, puzzle trivia and interactive activities. "Let's make a picture puzzle" makes use of ubiquitous household items such as glue, paper and scissors. Mrs. P's blog includes cool reading and writing ideas.

Parents of children with special needs will gain insight from poring over a myriad of EMSB educational tools. A section on Health and Well Being addresses subjects that affect entire families. The site broaches relationship boundaries, love versus control and ends with an encouraging quote from inspirational poet Maya Angelou. "You will face many defeats in your life, but never let yourself be defeated."

Visit the EMSB's Educational Websites and Resources at <https://www.emsb.qc.ca/emsb/community/education>.

Visit the Ministry of Education and Higher Education (MEES) Open School at <https://ecoleouverte.ca/en/>

## COVID-19 (Coronavirus) Information

English Montreal School Board

## IMPORTANT PHONE NUMBERS

For general information about COVID-19, call the toll-free hotline:

**1-514-644-4545** (Montreal Area)

If you are experiencing physical symptoms (cough or fever) do not leave home, call:

**1-514-644-4545** (Montreal Area)

If you are experiencing anxiety or emotional distress, call the Info-Social helpline (24/7):

**811**

Support for young people: [kidshelpphone.ca](http://kidshelpphone.ca)

**1-800-668-6868**

For family support, food banks, housing assistance

**211**

For general information about COVID-19, if you are experiencing physical symptoms, or anxiety or emotional distress, for support for young people, and family support, please click here for phone numbers to call. <https://www.emsb.qc.ca/emsb/community/covid19>



## Diffusing worries about COVID-19 for both parents and children

By Karla Dockery, Janet Perlis and Despina Vassiliou

With the COVID-19 health crisis, we have all experienced, and are experiencing major changes in how we live our daily lives. Active measures such as *social distancing*, *self-isolation*, and *quarantines*, all of which aim to reduce the spread of COVID-19, may trigger anxiety, panic, worry and fear. Other common reactions may also include:

- Social withdrawal
- Difficulty concentrating or sleeping
- Overexposure to media
- Feeling helpless or confused
- Hyper-vigilance to your health and that of family members
- Anger
- Feelings of loss or grief

Acknowledge and accept that some anxiety is normal. It is natural for us to have these feelings, but it is best to use coping strategies to help ourselves and our children through it. Discuss what is happening and



Felicia Ponzo, specialized educator at WIAIH's Pat Roberts Developmental Centre sharing her rainbow drawing. (Photo, WIAIH)

the anxiety felt surrounding the pandemic. Here are some practical steps that you can take during this time:

### Set up a routine

Routines build the expectation of what we need to do and what will happen next. Anxiety is usually fueled by the unknown; therefore, establish routines and schedules to help predict and ascertain what is to come.

- Wake up daily at the same time.
- Dress for school or work.
- Create calendar to map activities.
- Plan each day (e.g., include an attainable goal).
- Get the whole family involved with chores.
- Use the time to be productive, perhaps begin spring cleaning.



Grade 2 Mackay Centre School student Ynchin poses with her rainbow creation. (Photo, Mackay Centre School)

### Stay connected with others

While we are encouraged to self-isolate and engage in social distancing, we can text, make phone calls and/or video-chat to maintain social connections with family members, friends and neighbours. Social connections allow for reassurance, comfort, and a sense of community. We are not alone.

- Schedule at least one phone call/video-chat each day.
- Chat about other things and not only COVID-19.
- Check on neighbours by phone.
- Offer to deliver groceries or provide social support to older individuals.
- Play online games with family and friends (e.g. Kahoot!).

### Choose media options wisely

It is important to keep informed as the situation evolves on a daily basis. However,



Mackay Centre School student Kai gluing his rainbow together. (Photo, Mackay Centre School)

overexposure to the media may increase anxiety and a sense of loss of control.

- Limit intake of news (e.g., only see updates during 6 p.m. news broadcast).
- Avoid misinformation, by sticking to trusted sources to keep informed.
- Dedicate some media time to educational options (e.g., [starfall.com](http://starfall.com) [pbskids.org](http://pbskids.org)) as part of your routine.
- Watch family-friendly comedies as humour is important.
- Use media to connect with others such as through Facetime, etc.

### Highlight the good things that are happening around us

It is easy for us to solely focus on negative things that are happening around us, especially during challenging times. To help us retain a positive frame of mind, and to keep things in perspective, we should actively look for the positives around us.

- Highlight how people are helping each other out (e.g., getting groceries for elderly neighbours).
- There is more family time, which can include puzzles, treasure hunts, board games, etc.
- Create a gratitude journal.
- Remember: Your efforts are saving lives.

### Self-care

Focusing on building your own resiliency is not being selfish. Do things that make you feel good and centered; thereby, increasing your ability to nurture your family. Although your typical activities may not be possible due to social distancing, you can find ways to adapt to the 'new normal'.

- Outdoor activities: Connecting with nature can enhance mental strength. Ac-

tivities can include walks, gardening, or birdwatching.

- Take "time-out" breaks to defuse stress; Listen to music, read, meditate/mindfulness, yoga, colour, or take a bath.
- Exercise: Even though gyms are closed, you can replicate the in-class experience by downloading work-out programs (dance, yoga, cardio) to follow at home using on-line apps and videos.
- Schedule time for yourself. Sometimes we need space, so prioritize a personal time.

### When to seek help

It is important to recognize that while feelings of anxiety may be expected under these current circumstances, at times, these may be beyond what is expected. Common signs that you, your child, or teen may need help for their anxiety is that they demonstrate significant **distress** (e.g., crying, irritability) which **interferes** in daily activities (e.g., refuses to get out of bed, can't concentrate). If these persist then it is time to reach out for help.

### Where to seek help

A list of resources is available at [www.emsb.qc.ca/emsb/community/education/health](http://www.emsb.qc.ca/emsb/community/education/health)

Through these efforts we can help reduce our anxiety and the anxiety in our children; thus, decreasing the mental health impact of COVID-19.



Mackay Centre School student Rory looking beyond his colourful rainbow sun. (Photo, Mackay Centre School)

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



## MNA juggles work and family during the COVID-19 pandemic

By Jennifer Maccarone

During this pandemic, many families who have children with special needs are faced with the interruption of school and essential services that their children were used to receiving. While this time is difficult for everyone, the burden is particularly heavy for those of us who are caregivers to children on the autism spectrum, or with intellectual and/or physical handicaps. Conjugating “special needs” with “COVID-19” is a challenge.

Working from home as a Member of the National Assembly, while caring for my two autistic children, has been a trying experience. And I’m lucky, because my kids are verbal, and I receive support from friends, family and colleagues. But there are times when my patience runs thin, when I can’t take the screaming, the yelling, the

crying, the movements, the anxiety, the stress, and the constant demands on my time and my personal space. So, if I’m feeling overwhelmed, I can only imagine how difficult it is for people on the spectrum, who are intellectually disabled, or who have a handicap. Figuring out a new normal, especially when many don’t understand what’s going on or why, is a cruel reality for our community right now.

Don’t get me wrong. I love my kids to the moon and back and I would do anything for them. But I admit to sometimes wanting to escape my social isolation and captivity with them during this pandemic. Right now, I’m just doing my best to juggle the demands of work with being a teacher, a therapist, a friend, and a mom. Am I failing at some of it? Probably. It depends on the

pected and difficult times. I cannot stress enough in these times to be kind and patient with yourselves and take those moments that you can for you in a conscious way. I am hearing and reading a lot of stories about how this pandemic has affected peoples’ lives, and the day-to-day struggles they are having to go through and surmount. It is different for everyone, so do not judge yourself in comparison to others.

We are also not strangers to carrying the load of everything entailed in caring for or being someone with a handicap. This is a daunting task but one we are familiar with. This pause has put us in a position to re-evaluate how we go about our daily lives and prioritize.

Some of us have a family to support us through this and some of us are alone. Regardless, we can organize ourselves to get through it. We can divide and conquer. We can divvy up the daily tasks within our family and more importantly, reach out to our network for support. We can take advantage

of the help of others and the resources available to get through challenges.

day, who you ask, how much sleep I got, and if there’s wine with dinner. So, it’s good to know that superwoman (and superman) don’t exist. Feeling overwhelmed as a caregiver is normal, and it’s ok to want some “me-time.” It also helps me to know that I’m not alone, and there are many parents like me that are worried for their kids and seeking support.



MNA Jennifer Maccarone spending time with her children Samuel and Bianca Beldie. (Photo, Edouard Plante-Fr chet, La Presse)

So, while we’re all navigating social distancing and missing essential services, contact your school teachers and attendants. Visit Open School to find educational resources <https://ecoleouverte.ca/en/>.

Reach out to your psychologists and therapists to see what online solutions they may be providing to support their clients. Call your friends and family when you need to vent or take a break. Remember to look after yourself. As caregivers and parents, it’s crucial to take the time to look after our own mental and physical health in order to be strong for those dependent on us.

Stress, anxiety and depression are common at any time for us and our kids, but

worse as we face this pandemic. There are mental health resources such as Tel-Aide (514-935-1101) and Ligne Parents (1-800-361-5085) which provide counselling and support for parents. More information and resources are also available for families online at [Quebec.ca/coronavirus](http://Quebec.ca/coronavirus) or calling Info-Social at 811.

Remember, we’re all in this together and it will get better. If you have questions or need help finding a resource, please contact my office at 514-395-2929 or [Jennifer.Maccarone.WSL@assnat.qc.ca](mailto:Jennifer.Maccarone.WSL@assnat.qc.ca). I’m here for you, and you are not alone.

Jennifer Maccarone is the MNA for Westmount-Saint-Louis.



## Québec en pause

By Joanne Charron

Being parents of handicapped children or adults, or being handicapped yourself, we are not strangers in dealing with unex-

pected and difficult times. I cannot stress enough in these times to be kind and patient with yourselves and take those moments that you can for you in a conscious way. I am hearing and reading a lot of stories about how this pandemic has affected peoples’ lives, and the day-to-day struggles they are having to go through and surmount. It is different for everyone, so do not judge yourself in comparison to others.

We are also not strangers to carrying the load of everything entailed in caring for or being someone with a handicap. This is a daunting task but one we are familiar with. This pause has put us in a position to re-evaluate how we go about our daily lives and prioritize.

Some of us have a family to support us through this and some of us are alone. Regardless, we can organize ourselves to get through it. We can divide and conquer. We can divvy up the daily tasks within our family and more importantly, reach out to our network for support. We can take advantage

of the help of others and the resources available to get through challenges.

No one can help you unless they know you need it, and our community is geared up for this and waiting to be of service. So, start making those phone calls, start checking in on friends, reach out through social media. Your community and your government are there to help you. You can even reach out to your local MNA or MP and of course your CIUSSS. The CIUSSS have been mandated to get in touch with all of their clients to check in and see how you are doing financially, if you have food, how you are coping, how your health is, if you are in need of anything that can help you, among other concerns that you might be experiencing.

Embrace the “Pause.” We do not have to recreate the multitude of services and therapies that our children, or we, were getting. This is an opportunity for us to take a break. For those who feel they or, perhaps, the children will regress during this period, on the contrary, it may be what we need. And when

we start back up again I believe we will have bigger gains. Our schedules are all-absorbing and leave little time for just being and connecting with our loved ones, which is even more important than any therapy can provide, it’s a reset to reconnect.

Do not put undue stress on yourselves, one thing at a time, one thing a day, it will all get done.

Ça va bien aller !

Some helpful resources:

Find your CIUSSS: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-system-and-services/service-organization/ciuss-and-ciuss/>  
Bell Let’s Talk: <https://letstalk.bell.ca/en/>  
Your local MNA: <http://www.assnat.qc.ca/fr/index.html>

Office des personnes handicapées du Québec: <https://www.quebec.ca/en/health/health-issues/a-z/2019-coronavirus/>

Joanne Charron is the president of the C.A.R.E. Centre.

## Navigating the new financial landscape due to COVID-19

By Harold Akerman

First and most importantly, I hope you and your loved ones are safe and healthy. As parents/caretakers of differently able persons, we together are facing this new reality of COVID-19. The governments are trying their best to help but we need to ensure they know our needs.

The federal government has a web site, [Canada.ca](http://Canada.ca), where you can find all federal services. You can also call them at 1-800 – OCANADA. Under normal circumstances the phone is answered quickly. But we are in unfamiliar territory right now.

### Tax filing

The 2019 tax filing deadline has been extended but you should file as soon as possible, if you will have a refund. I normally would apply the refund from one spouse to the debt of the other spouse but now will not as the refund will be received within a week and the debt needs to be paid after April 30, 2020.

If you are entitled to the many tax credits based upon your family income, please ensure that you have registered for direct deposit.

The one-time GST tax payments were paid on April 9 based on your 2018 tax return eligibility to receive the GST credit (income level for singles is \$44,000 and couples is \$54,000).

The maximum amounts for the 2019-2020 benefit year will increase from:

- \$443 to \$886, if you are single
- \$580 to \$1,160, if you are married or living common-law
- \$153 to \$306 for each child under the age of 19 (excluding the first eligible child of a single parent)
- \$290 to \$580 for the first eligible child of a single parent
- Increased the maximum annual Canadian Child Benefit (CCB) payment amounts, only for the 2019-20 benefit year, by \$300 per child
- Based on family income, the overall increase for families receiving CCB will be approximately \$550 on average; these families will receive an extra \$300 per child as part of their May 2020 payment.

### Financial packages for Canadians

The federal government has announced (and keeps improving) its financial aid package for Canadians. Depending on your circumstances, you will contact Employment Insurance (EI) for EI benefits and the Canadian Revenue Agency (CRA) for CERB - Canada Emergency Response Benefits. Visit [Canada.ca](http://Canada.ca) and there you will find the basic information concerning eligibility, when to apply, how much you will receive and how to apply. You will see a link under Financial Assistance, click and explore. Here you will find information for individuals, businesses and industries.

Remember there is help and you are not the only one confused. The criteria is improving as the government receives our views and circumstances.

### Deferring payments and receiving emergency benefits

The financial institutions should be contacted for deferral of mortgage payments (current

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and  
Stay Well

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LIGHT IT UP BLUE 2020

## Lighting it up blue on Autism Awareness Day

On April 2, people around the world dressed in blue and lit up their doorsteps in blue to celebrate Autism Awareness Day. At first glance this photo appears to be a Zoom screen. On a closer look, you will see that it is a hand-made collage. This Montreal-based community initiative, led by Marian Pinsky, provides a memorable and meaningful visual to celebrate autism awareness.

payments could be waived now, but the missed payments will be paid). For deferral of credit card payments and/or a reduction in the interest rates, use the topic - COVID-19 financial relief. If you are not earning any employment/business sales, you should apply for the CERB every month. Please check the website at <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/services/benefits/apply-for-cerb-with-cra.html>. And remember that each period is for a stated amount of time. For each, you must meet the criteria that may change from period to period as the government changes the eligibility criteria.

Should you need assistance there is a virtual assistant on [Canada.ca](http://Canada.ca) that may assist you, call the 1-800 or contact your Member of Parliament.

### Advice specific to the special needs community

There is a Disability Advisory Committee at CRA. They can be contacted at <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/corporate/about-canada-revenue-agency-cra/disability-advisory-committee.html>. There,

you can voice your concerns and explain the special circumstances that you are experiencing.

Facebook groups are readily available that share pertinent information. Here are a few:

- Montreal Parents of Kids with Special Needs
- Special Needs Network of Montreal
- Quebec Special Needs Families Support Group
- All Access Life

Please remember to verify the information with legitimate sources as there are those that will take advantage of the situation.

Stay strong, stay healthy and good luck.

Harold Akerman is a practicing public accountant with over 30 years of experience. He presents on subjects related to personal tax and disability-related topics. Contact Harold at [haroldcpaca@gmail.com](mailto:haroldcpaca@gmail.com) or 514-979-8752.



## School is closed: A social story to help children with autism understand the pandemic

By Jordan Smith

This social story was created by Jordan Smith, who was an ASD consultant with the English Montreal School Board's Student Services Department. She wrote this story to help children with autism understand the pandemic. We thank Jordan for her contribution, dedication to her work and the children with autism that she cared so deeply about. Soon after contributing this piece, Jordan passed away. We extend our deepest condolences to her family, friends and colleagues.

To read the story, [click here](#).



## A parent's perspective on the Mackay and PEL Schools' response to COVID-19

By Ann Gagnon

It was a parent/teacher night the evening that the Premier of Quebec François Legault closed the schools. At our school, the students had already left, there were no school books, personal belongings and definitely no adaptive equipment sent home that afternoon.

The wonderful team at the Mackay Rehabilitation Centre made it possible for us to pick up my son Bradley's equipment, including his gait trainer. The smile and pride on Bradley's face is because of all the patience, dedication and unconditional love of the Philip E. Layton and Mackay Rehabilitation team.

They are dedicated. They truly care and love their students. It is not just a job that they walk away from at the end of the day.

They bring work home. They do research and videos on their own time. Each and every one of them has a special place in their hearts for the students. And without them the children would never blossom as they do. It has been proven over and over again during this difficult time. Families have received phone calls, uplifting videos and that feeling of knowing we are not alone during all this.

## Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools work together with the Lethbridge- Layton-Mackay Rehabilitation staff to support their community

By Wendy Singer

While having children at home full-time is an adjustment for all, it has been particularly challenging for families with children with special needs. Limited respite services, decreased care and no therapies can take a significant toll on families as they take on their child's daily physical care and in some cases, medical care while tending to emotional issues and at-home learning.

Mackay Centre students have motor, language and communication disorders, and auditory impairments. Philip E. Layton's (PEL) students have many of these same issues along

with visual impairments, and may be accompanied by developmental and intellectual impairments as well. Both groups of students study the Quebec ministry of Education's curriculum (known as the French acronym MEES) with their educators while receiving hands-on rehabilitation services.

When the school closures were announced on March 13, education and rehabilitation teams at the Mackay Centre and PEL schools sprang into action. "It is particularly challenging, both emotionally and physically, for our families. Parents have expressed to us that as the children are off their regular routines, they are anxious; some are not sleeping well and or experiencing increased behavioral issues," said Hema Patel, clinical coordinator, CIUSS West Central Montreal Health, Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre. "Families may have lost hours of caregiver support because workers can't come to the home. Or they may be servicing multiple clients and families do not want them entering their homes. Families who utilized respite services are having to suddenly adapt to the respite centres being closed or having changed their offer of service."

The first thing the Mackay and PEL teams did was to reach out to all families for a

check-in on how they were managing at home. Parents of children with physical diagnoses were given the opportunity to retrieve their child's equipment such as standing frames, walkers, gait trainers, braces, etc. It is important that these children continue to use their equipment at home to maintain physical alignment and prevent deformities. The rehab team has also emailed home programs, activity and music videos, and have started exploring Zoom therapy sessions. Online resources have also been suggested such as <https://family.gonoodle.com> that

encourages indoor movement breaks. "Families that are experiencing increased stressors have been referred to the team social worker and psychologist," Patel added.

According to Greg Watson, vice principal of the two schools, constant communication between the education and rehabilitation teams has been key in figuring out the new landscape. "It's hard when we speak to families and they are having a really hard time. We're putting our heads together and brainstorming on how we can help them," he said. "Doing this together will help us get through this."

Staff have adapted the educational content presented by the government and the English Montreal School Board, making it accessible for children who use communication devices, are non-verbal, deaf or blind, adapting lessons for those who learn in different ways, and in general, making the content relevant to their specific needs.

"The first two weeks were a bit of a shock, trying to figure out how we can work without actually seeing our clients. Now, we've figured out how to work and are in a more regular rhythm. Our families have been very responsive said Patel. "It shows how resilient our team, students and families are."



Philip E. Layton student Deepan and his sister make dinosaur cookies at home while self-isolating.



## Sports

# Postponed 2020 Tokyo games puts Levine's dreams on hold

By Wendy Singer

Alison Levine is the number one boccia player in the world. She was primed to take gold at the Tokyo 2020 Paralympic games until COVID-19 took hold and the games were postponed until 2021. Now, like all Paralympians and Olympians, 29-year-old Levine is refocusing and searching for the motivation to maintain her momentum and physical strength while sheltering at home.

This is the first time in Olympic and Paralympic history that the games have been postponed, though they were cancelled five times due to World War I and II. As a member of the Canadian Paralympic Committee Council, Levine had the opportunity to vote on this issue. "The decision to postpone the games was unanimous. It's no time for a sporting event. We have to put aside all of our feelings and hopes for the greater world," she said.

Levine became interested in sport when she developed mobility problems due to idiopathic muscular dystrophy at the age of 12. This condition makes her nerves stop functioning, causing the muscles that they control to lose strength. She started with horseback riding, then wheelchair basketball, sledge hockey and wheelchair rugby (her favourite), but had to give up one after the other as her physical condition deteriorated. She threw her first boccia ball in December 2012 and, by January 2013, was invited to join the national team. Boccia is a sport similar to curling or lawn bowling.

## Training at home

With Levine's rigorous training every second day at the Olympic Stadium's Institut National du Sport du Québec at a halt, she is now training at home. But it cannot replace the physio and occupational therapy, massage, sports psychology, stretching,

meeting with coaches, video reviews and meditation that are so important to her physical and mental conditioning. "I would be in a lot worse shape than I am in now if I didn't have sport. It's difficult to be motivated when it's just for you, but for your sport – I'm all in!" said Levine, attributing sport to the independence she enjoys, now living on her own and driving a van. "I am a lot braver than I used to be. I'm able to take big life risks because sport has told me it's okay to fail."

During COVID-19, Levine is self-quarantined at her residence Habitation Tango in NDG, where she lives with her 10-year-old Labernese MIRA service dog Ghia and receives care from two attendants and prepared food from a very careful kitchen staff. Her mother pitches in, leaving deliver-



Alison Levine concentrating as she throws a boccia ball at the Lima 2019 Parapan American Games last summer. Levine won the bronze medal in pairs at this event. (Photo, Canadian Paralympic Committee)

ies at her door, which Levine picks up item by item. Ghia helps her with transfers and much more. "It's very isolating and those supports that we have in place are so important right now. I had a problem with my motorized wheelchair and sent it to get fixed. While it was gone, I was stuck at home. I couldn't take Ghia out for a walk. We were limited to the front lawn of our building," shared Levine.

With a more flexible training schedule, Levine hand-bikes every day for 30 minutes and when motivated, throws boccia balls in her corridor. Since there is no one to assist her, she picks up the balls herself, making her drills less efficient. She manages to throw 60 to 100 balls, a large decrease from the 250 she throws at training at the Big O. Her father built a makeshift ball picker upper that is speeding up the process.

The change of pace, however, is showing some merit. "What's been a blessing in dis-

guise is I can take this opportunity to give my body a physical break. And I have time to work on the mental side of the sport." Levine is watching video reviews and analyzing her opponents' performances, and practicing her deep breathing techniques. She attends weekly online meetings with her coach and teammates.

## Self-advocacy during the pandemic

A greater worry to severely disabled athletes like Levine is their high susceptibility to COVID-19 and inability to fight it. Taking the necessary precautions of hand washing and not attending large gatherings and shopping centres, especially during flu season, is Levine's norm. "Welcome to my reality," she added.

Levine salutes Canada's medical teams for the extraordinary measures they are taking to save lives during this pandemic. She shares personal concerns about the rights of people with disabilities, encouraging self-advocacy. "If it comes down to the health care authorities having to choose who gets a ventilator, are they going to be faced with making the difficult decision of choosing someone who doesn't have a disability and recovers quickly or someone who will take longer?" she asked.

"The notion of the value of people with disabilities may come into question. It's a scary thought that you may not be chosen to live because you have a lesser quality of life. Don't think that you're not worth it or worthy. You have the right to live and be treated like everyone else."

## Advice on learning, sporting and coping at home

Levine spent her Grade 9 year in the hospital, following the school curriculum. Not a time she likes to remember, she sympathizes with students who are now learning from home. Recalling the day-to-day boredom, she advises students to look at their education with an end goal. "In five years, you want to look back and be proud of the work you did when you were alone," she said. "It's a great time to learn things unconventionally, like how to write a cheque or learn math through baking."

Levine encourages aspiring athletes to try different sports until you find the one that's



Alison Levine enjoys some fresh air with her service dog Ghia. (Photo, Alison Levine)

right for you. "Think outside the box, always enjoy what you're doing."

This was supposed to be Levine's year on top of the world, and now she is fighting to maintain her strength and motivation. What she has learnt, though, is it's alright to give yourself a break and use the mental health resources available. "Especially as Paralympians, we're meant to show resilience and overcome obstacles. That doesn't mean I've done all these things without grieving the loss of my physical abilities. I'm doing well now, but it's not to say that I'm not going to cry tomorrow. It's ok to not be ok."

## About boccia

Boccia was introduced onto the Paralympic program in 1984. Originally designed for people with severe cerebral palsy, players with a wide variety of disabilities now qualify to compete in the sport. Similar to curling or lawn bowling, Levine's goal is to throw her balls (three in a solo game, and six with her teammates Marco Dispaltro and Iulian Ciobanu) with laser focus and precision in order to land them as close as possible to a target ball. Those closest to the target accumulate scores. Players throw six balls within four minutes per end. Each game consists of four ends.

Levine competes in the BC4 category, which is reserved for players with severe physical disabilities in four limbs, other than those with cerebral palsy. She compares boccia to a physical chess game. "In a matter of seconds, you have to analyze, decide and execute. Every single shot changes the game," said Levine.



## A teacher's perspective

# Teacher finds comfort connecting with Hampstead Elementary community

By Margot Faessler

As a classroom teacher at Hampstead Elementary School going through this period of surreal COVID-19 limbo, I don't know where I would be, or how I would feel without having the sense of immediate connection to parents that is made possible through our classroom platform Classdojo. Until now, I hadn't been much of a virtual communicator. Sure, I would send out

class photos of special occasions, but now I am able to communicate smoothly and in a timely manner with all of my parents. It has proven to be rewarding, calming and reassuring. In addition, it is an instant form of communication for both myself and for parents who know that we are all here for each other.

From posting educational resources, to light-hearted art messages saying "I miss you," the ability to reach out gives me a sense of purpose and professional satisfaction. Some parents enjoy sharing new experiences, how they made science experiments with their child or homemade play dough, walks in the rain, the wild explosive chaos that results from cramped living quarters and the calming and grounding much longed for periods that come from essential routines within evenly structured days.

Some parents post candid photos which reveal so much about their wondrous children. As a teacher, I observe these children's facial expressions, their body language, the depth of connection, intrigue and curiosity behind the activity, and wish that there was some kind of magical pause button I could

use to capture these palpable moments.

As a school, we are reaching out to all parents and students through telephone calls, emails and videos. The English Montreal School Board (EMSB) home page has an educational resource section for weekly activities, in addition to educational and mental health support for families and special needs students.

Visit the EMSB's Educational Websites and Resources at <https://www.emsb.qc.ca/emsb/community/education>



Teacher Margot Faessler and student Tyler make potato latkes before schools closed.

Margot Faessler is a ROOTS (Reaching Optimal Opportunities to Succeed) teacher at Hampstead Elementary School. The Roots class includes students who are not yet able

to be integrated into a mainstream class. Students in this class have autism or Down syndrome.

## Parent Perspective

# Task-oriented education at home a big help for Hampstead mom and great lessons for kids

By Lana Nimmons

As a parent of two children with special needs, I've discovered that I need to be easily adaptable. All children have big emotions and from what I've discovered conversing with friends and family with children, all the challenges fall from the same tree. The difference for a child on the spectrum is that sometimes they have trouble expressing what is bothering them.

The first few weeks at home were especially challenging. My kids had just come back

from March break to start their new school routine, only to be sent home...and suddenly. It's jarring, for everyone.

Tyler attends the ROOTS (Reaching Optimal Opportunities to Succeed) Class and Rose is in Grade 4 at Hampstead Elementary School. I didn't want to throw them into a structured routine. I figured I would concentrate on family time, get them used to being just us four at home. At night I would spend time searching for fun activities that focus on a sensory experience. We made play dough, I made a bucket of lavender scented rice (like a sandpit) with toys, and we made a volcano.

I also began concentrating on the ever-important life skills. I was feeling overwhelmed keeping up with household chores, playing with the kids, and preparing meals. I realized I needed help or I would burn out fast.

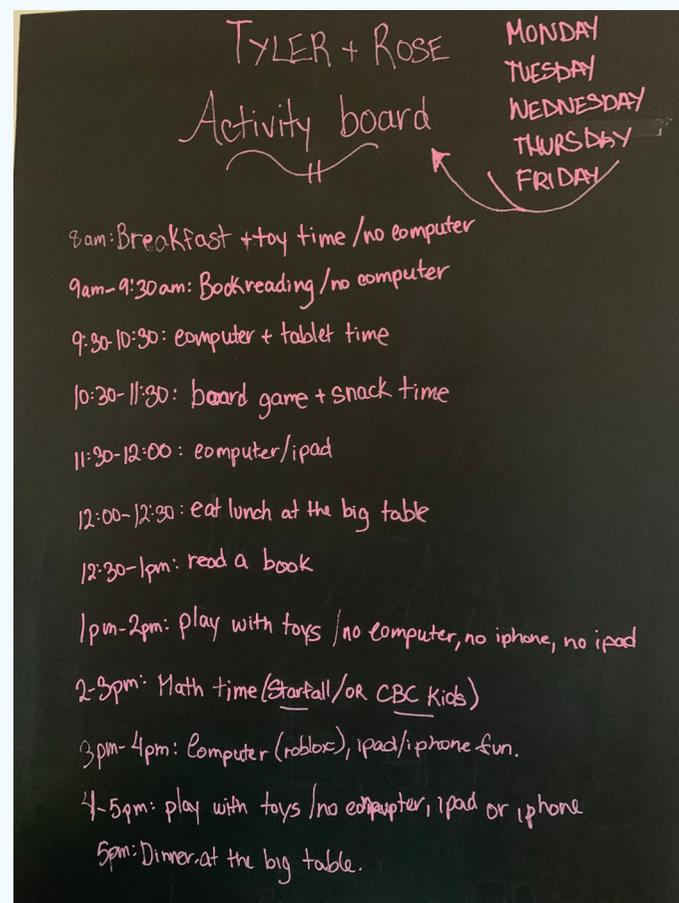
I started off introducing small things like loading the dishwasher, then slowly added things like cleaning up toys, sweeping. Nothing was done perfectly, but they seemed proud of their accomplishments. Last week I started to get them to help with dinner. They read the instructions of the recipe while I cook and chop.

Since they do like electronics I make a flexible schedule with education built in, and electronics are their reward.

Another big part of our routine is doing video chats with their cousins, which keeps us connected with the outside world.

Both of my kids miss school. Tyler asks about the school bus and gym, and Rose teared up when she saw her friends on a Zoom call. They had a hard time for the first few weeks, but now seem to have adjusted to the new norm.

Lana Nimmons is a parent of two children with special needs who attend Hampstead Elementary School, and a photographer.



Lana Nimmons shares the activity board she makes for her children while sheltering at home.



## Principal plans for “What ifs” but COVID-19 crisis presents unforeseen challenges

By Jennifer Le Huquet

Like many in the field of education, I’m a planner. I’ve also always been a bit of a (productive) daydreamer, and I tend to let my mind wander to different scenarios. I challenge myself as a leader: What would you do if there was an unforeseen evacuation in winter; if the food delivery for the student-run cafeteria failed to show up one morning; if, if, if? And then I plan a response and condition myself to keep calm and solution-oriented under different circumstances. I build relationships and place trust in those around me to act in the best interest of our students. Well, I can say for certain that my mind never wandered to the scenario that we find ourselves in now – with school suddenly and indefinitely disrupted, and the threat of a dangerous virus keeping us separated.

Many schools around the world are faced with the same questions: What does school mean in this new context? With limited tools, time and resources, what is the most important thing for us to be teaching and doing right now to support our students and their families?

John Grant High School (JGHS) is an alternative school within the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) that serves a population of exceptional students, aged 12 to 21, who have often not met traditional studies with success. We offer unique curricula and hands-on learning opportunities that lead to certifications in the Challenges (DÉFIS) or Work Orientation Training Path (WOTP) programs. The school is amazingly diverse along every metric – cultural, socio-economic, intellectual, age, gender, to name a few – and yet there is a feeling of family and of acceptance that transcends all of those things. This is a school where everyone gathers daily in the lunchroom for snacks and meals, where every staff member knows every student – not just by their names but also their favourite mythical creature or their favourite kind of sandwich; their biggest accomplishments and greatest fears. And if the students don’t know, we help them discover these parts of themselves, their passions, purpose and skills.

We hold the fundamental belief that every person is entitled to unconditional love, to respect, to express themselves and their identity, to pursue their passions and develop their skills, to make mistakes and to learn. We embark daily on re-building lives through education. With this in mind, we were faced with a task of figuring out what this education is going to look like in a digital context.

Do our students have access to the necessary tools; will they know how to connect? What will be helpful to our students and their families? How will we maintain the sense of community that is so important? Education in this context is not going to come in the form of well-intentioned kits from the Ministry of Education. There is no one-sized solution that will meet all of our students’ needs.

When I put these questions to the staff, we realized that the best way to gather information was going to be a phone call home to each family. The staff immediately volunteered to call every home, and we gathered the information we needed to move forward.

What emerged was a portrait of what is important and unique about John Grant, which we categorized into six key areas. But we also realized that “students need to Maslow before they can Bloom,” and we set in motion a support system to help students whose families were experiencing difficulties due to this situation. The EMSB has also been resourceful and is helping put in place emergency food assistance for struggling families. With their basic food needs met, we could focus on building a weekly “menu” of activities designed to support and stimulate our students.

I am incredibly proud of the staff who have re-invented themselves, from weekly cooking videos, to fitness videos to mindfulness videos, from designing life skills exercises to address new challenges such as setting routines or finding food-

banks, to online literacy and numeracy initiatives to activities that bring us together such as our virtual Autism Awareness Campaign titled #StandTogetherInKindness. The students and families have been appreciative of our efforts and although I never could have dreamed up this scenario, I also know that what we are doing during this

time holds true to our values and I end every week with an expression of gratitude to the staff for their dedication, creativity, sense of purpose and passion that shine brightly and remind us that #ÇaVaBienAller.

Jennifer Le Huquet is the principal of John Grant High School.

### JOHN GRANT LEARN @ HOME PLAN

Parents and Students: Consult your school email account for details on how to connect to our online learning platforms OR send an email to [johngrant@emsb.qc.ca](mailto:johngrant@emsb.qc.ca) for more information.

**Week 2: April 13-17**

- COMMUNITY CONNECTION**
  - All students: Window Silhouette Activity
  - CASP students: Meeting with Ms. Cari & Ms. Kathleen
- LITERACY**
  - All Students: Suggested Readings on Reading A-Z
  - All Students: Read one French text on Reading A-Z
  - MAP, WOTP and APP Students: Weekly writing prompts in English
- NUMERACY**
  - CASP Students: Math Games
  - DEFIS Students: Reflex Math & Math Games
  - MAP Students: Math Skill Building & Games
  - WOTP & APP Students: Online Math assignments through Math Help Services (check your EMSB email for login info.)
- LIFESKILLS**
  - All Students: Cooking with Chef Armour!
    - Assemble Ingredients for Chef R-G's first Recipe: *Chocolate Chip Cookies*
  - WOTP & APP Students: Montreal Metro Map Riddles
- CREATIVITY**
  - CASP Students: Colouring activity
  - MAP & DEFIS Students: Craft Activity
  - MAP 3/4 and PW1-R Students: Rube Goldberg Machine Challenge!
  - PW2-3 & APP Students: Colouring Activity
- PHYSICAL ACTIVITY & WELLNESS**
  - All Students: Keep Fit with Coach O'Reilly (video) - Week 2
  - PW2-3 & APP Students: Alphabet Fitness



## A community moved online

# Resources and activities available at home

By Cindy Davis and Wendy Singer

With the closure of schools, businesses and services caused by COVID-19, many children and adults find themselves without the resources on which they typically depend. Fortunately, organizations affiliated with the special needs community, both locally and internationally, have mobilized quickly to provide much needed programming, resources, and a sense of staying connected. Some of these resources are available to the general public and some are member or student specific – either way, the goal is to keep people engaged. This is by no means a complete list, but just a sampling!

## All Access Life's 'The Ultimate Quarantine Resources for People with Special Needs'

Bradley Heaven and Dan O'Connor, the dynamic duo behind All Access Life, have updated their website to include a new section called "The Ultimate Quarantine Resources for People with Special Needs." The list includes a variety of their own resources, as well as many they collected from other organizations and sources. The resources are divided into sections. A general section provides a variety of generalized resources related to COVID-19 with articles, videos, classes, tips on using Zoom, cooking sessions, online speech therapy sessions, and more. There are also separate sections with specialized resources for specific disorders and disabilities such as autism, cerebral palsy, Down syndrome, the Deaf and Hard-of-hearing, and the Blind and visually impaired. To access the full list, [click here](#).

## Giant Steps' resource list has something for everyone

Giant Steps Resource and Training Centre staff felt that what students need more than

academic work at this time is to maintain a connection with the other children and teaching staff. Many of their classes are being offered online, and others are done by video. They have created an extensive list of resources on coping strategies, educational ideas and activities that, thanks to Marla Cable, coordinator of Giant Steps Resource and Training Centre, they were eager to share with *Inspirations* readers. They include:

- Learning strategies <http://www.ldon-line.org/questions/teaching#5093>
- Tons of ideas on their Pinterest board <https://www.pinterest.ca/ressources/>
- [Talking to Children About COVID-19 \(Coronavirus\): A Parent Resource](#)
- [Video: How to Explain COVID-19 Social Distancing to Kids](#)
- Insights from Autistic Adults: [Thoughts from a Quarantined Autistic – Autistically Alex](#)
- Capsules éducatives du Zoo de Granby (spécialement pour la quarantaine) <https://www.facebook.com/zoogranby/>
- Capsules de l'Astrolab du Mont-Mégantic (aussi pendant la quarantaine) <https://www.facebook.com/MontMégantic/>
- Check out the complete Giant Steps resource list [here](#).

## Special Olympics Québec (SOQ) keeps athletes in shape

SOQ is broadcasting its virtual programs, geared for athletes, families and volunteers, on various communication networks. Their "QSO Challenge," launched on March 23, includes live activities on [Facebook](#) and weekday emails. Each day of the week represents a different theme: Fitness on Monday; healthy lifestyle on Tuesday; physical training on Wednesday; special guests and training on Thursday; and yoga on Friday. Tools for athletes and school-aged participants are available on their website and social feeds. The "Active Start at Home" program, for two to seven-year-olds, encourages the development of motor skills and movement. "FUNDamentals at Home" for eight to 12-year-olds aims to develop basic sport skills. On April 3, SOQ launched the "Virtual Olympiads" (<https://www.facebook.com/events/247216219748150/>) which is a five-week sports challenge for athletes, SOQ



Rick Hansen.

partners and the public. Stay tuned every Friday for weekly updates! For information, visit [olympiquesthequebec.ca](http://olympiquesthequebec.ca)

## Summit @ Home

The folks at Summit School have created their own YouTube Channel called "Summit at Home." There are six main themes within the channel; stay active, food fun, arts and crafts, community and learning, fun and challenges, and student videos. The channel is filled with fun and informative videos by Summit School staff and students that include yoga, dance challenges, cooking lessons, story times where students can listen to stories read by their teachers, easy to follow art sessions, science experiments and so much more. It offers a ton of fun and engaging activities. Check it out [here](#).

## The Child Mind Institute chatting live on Facebook

The Child Mind Institute is a US-based independent non-profit dedicated to transforming the lives of children and families struggling with mental health and learning disorders. They offer Facebook live chats with expert clinicians, remote evaluations, daily tips, and a comprehensive list of resources for parents. Some topics they cover include coping strategies, autism and Coronavirus, remote learning, managing anxiety,

discipline and behaviour and dealing with loss.

Their list can be found [here](#).

## WIAIH virtual coffee break support group

The West Island Association of the Intellectually Handicapped (WIAIH) usually holds a coffee break support group on a monthly basis. They are now offering it virtually on Zoom every second Friday (according to demand) to WIAIH members. If you're inter-

Stay Home  
Stay Safe  
Stay Accessible



Bradley Heaven and Dan O'Connor from All Access Life.

ested in participating, would like to become a WIAIH member or have any questions, contact Franca at [assistance@wiah.gc.ca](mailto:assistance@wiah.gc.ca).

## Rick Hansen Foundation advocates with a cross-disability lens

The Man in Motion himself recently contributed an impactful article to *The Globe and Mail* titled "COVID-19 has shown Canada that it's possible to be more inclusive." He discusses the impact of isolation, financial hardships and "Include Me," a national coalition of over 200 disability stakeholders who are working on key recommendations to the federal government to ensure a cross-disability lens in their response to COVID-19. These leaders have been working tirelessly to advocate for an inclusive and equitable response. [Click here](#) to read the article.

Watch Rick Hansen's interview with CTV's Lisa Laflamme [here](#). Visit [rickhansen.com](http://rickhansen.com) for more information.

## CHILD-BRIGHT Network responds to COVID-19

Headquartered at the Research Institute of the McGill University Health Centre (RIMUHC), CHILD-BRIGHT is an innovative pan-Canadian network that aims to improve life outcomes for children with brain-based developmental disabilities and their families. Using family and child-focused approaches, they work to create novel interventions to optimize development, promote

... continued on p11



... Resources and activities continued from p10 health outcomes, and deliver responsive and supportive services.

The CHILD-BRIGHT Network has created a listing of resources for Canadian youth with disabilities, their families and support teams. It includes general health information and specific disability-related COVID-19 responses from the World Health Organization, the United Nations, Autism Speaks Canada, the International Disability Alliance, Children's Healthcare Canada and UNICEF. It also includes information about ongoing COVID-19 research, leisure activities (with links to Jooay and the Developmental Disabilities Association), learning opportunities and webinars, suggested communities to join, family and youth testimonials and more. Consult their website [here](#).

\*\*\*\*

Although we have mentioned only a handful of resources here, many organizations are providing services. We encourage you to check them out!

### Helping autistic kids cope with the chaos and uncertainty of coronavirus

Journalist Jackie Spinner shares her thoughts in the Washington Post, including struggling to work from home while explaining the change in routine to her children - one of whom has autism. [Click here to read the article](#).

### Face masks for the Deaf and Hard-of-hearing

An inventive college student from Kentucky developed an accessible face mask for the Deaf and Hard-of-hearing which enables them to lip-read through a small window. She is now producing them at home and sending them out for free to anyone who needs it. [Click here to read the full story](#).

### Kids with special needs face new challenges during COVID-19

CBC journalist Shari Okeke's article shares the challenges of two families with children with physical disabilities. [Click here to read the article](#).

## Quaran-teens with ADHD

By Stephanie Paquette

I recently participated in a webinar facilitated by Jodi Sleeper-Triplett, a trainer, mentor coach and author of the book *Empowering Youth with ADHD*. This webinar functioned as a forum for parents to express some of their biggest ADHD parenting challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. It was directed towards parents of teenagers, and many of the obstacles and possible solutions can be applied to children and youth who present with symptoms of ADHD. Below is a list of challenges that may arise and how they can be addressed.

### 1<sup>st</sup> challenge: Your teenager has no motivation to complete any work

Many school boards, private schools and teachers are communicating with parents and students to provide them with access to educational platforms and individual work. For youth who have lost their school communities as grounding anchors, motivation can be difficult to manifest. You can help your child by breaking down their school work into small chunks and performing accountability check-ins with them. You can also speak with your child to find out if there is someone that they can study with online or by telephone. This can be monitored by the parent but may allow your child to connect with someone outside of the family unit.

### 2<sup>nd</sup> challenge: Creating time for a physical outlet for energy

Although access to private and community athletic services is not currently possible, use the space in your house, in your yard or in an outdoor green space to release pent up energy and frustrations. If you remain indoors, find an activity that everyone can get involved in. This may involve a household task that is decided upon by your child, listening or playing music, or dancing. Taking breaks from school work or completing school work while standing up (the computer can be placed on a dresser) can encourage your child to remain more focused.

### 3<sup>rd</sup> challenge: Your child may feel lost without a consistent daily routine

A schedule is important because it allows you to be able to determine what you can realistically accomplish with your time. Creating a schedule with your teenager(s) will allow them to determine what they are able to do in their day and you may be able to somewhat mirror the routine that they had when they were attending school. Set up a routine in which there is a clear understanding of all the steps. Work on having accountability check-ins, which can also be done by text message. Give yourself and your teenager(s) time to adapt to a new schedule. If you provide your teenager(s) with opportunities for choice and they feel that their input is valued, it will be easier for them to buy-in to the schedule.

### 4<sup>th</sup> challenge: Distractions at home and online

Negotiate the times in which your teenager(s) can use their devices. Use timers and check-ins that you and your child agree upon. You do not need to consistently monitor your child, but if a schedule and times for devices are agreed upon by both of you, they will be more likely to comply with the request.

### 5<sup>th</sup> challenge: Face-to-face accountability

Ensure that there is someone or something to help your teenager remain accountable (e.g. a friend, trusted family member, timer).

### 6<sup>th</sup> challenge: Difficulty with time management skills

Children and youth who have ADHD may have difficulty with time-management. Timers can help them stay focused and function as a visual reminder to complete their task(s). Using timers can help build internal time-management skills, which is a useful life-skill.

### 7<sup>th</sup> challenge: Spiraling anxiety and worry

If your child is expressing anxiety and worry, you can ask him/her questions such as, "When you were anxious before, what did you do that worked for you?" Have candid

conversations with your child about how this stressful moment is also impacting you. Hearing you acknowledge that you are also experiencing challenges can help normalize your child's emotional experience. Not all teenagers are comfortable sharing their internal world with their parents and so your child could also be encouraged to keep a private journal to write in as needed. You can also validate a child's desire for privacy and assure him/her that you are available to speak, if they change their mind. Continue to check in with your adolescent and engage in an activity, like cooking a meal together, that promotes connection and communication.

### 8<sup>th</sup> challenge: Absolute refusal

Your child/children may refuse to do any work or participate in any family activities. Involve them in the process and ask them what they would like to learn about. Provide them with a task that is interesting to them and helpful for you. Perhaps they can research a topic that interests them and then teach you about what they learned.

### 9<sup>th</sup> challenge: Parents' emotions

As parents, we are also experiencing our own stressors and a complete upheaval in many spheres of our daily lives. It is important that we pick our battles with our children and that we rely on our immediate supports for perspective and connection. We must find ways to help one another so that our battles do not escalate. Being able to care for ourselves and modelling it to our children allows us to offer the gift of resilience to those we love.

For additional resources, visit <https://www.additudemag.com/>

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

TacTics Resource Services will be hosting three free online group sessions: COVID-19 parenting support (May 13 at 7 pm), Kidz Zone connection and activity group (May 14 at 1 pm), and Teens Zone connection, activity and chill group (May 15 at 1 pm). The Montreal Centre for Learning Disabilities is holding an ADHD/LD parent support group (May 19 at 7 pm). To register or find out more, contact Linda at [tacticsmtl@yahoo.com](mailto:tacticsmtl@yahoo.com) or 514-487-3533.



## Love, spring and hope continue on at Galileo Adult Education Centre

— By Lisa Trotto and Erica Onofrio

For students with special needs and learning challenges, the classroom setting not only offers a more personalized standard of teaching, but it delivers that human contact and element of safety upon which many of our students thrive. Although school closures have affected our students' daily routines, reinforcements and learning patterns, they have not been left to navigate this new world on their own! Galileo Adult Education Centre Social Integration Services (SIS) teachers have been hard at work providing distance learning in place of our usual hands-on classroom activities.

Of course, during these difficult times, worrisome thoughts flood our minds. Teachers fear that our students may regress in certain areas and that goals we worked so diligently to achieve during the year will not be revisited for some time. Having access to send our students and their parents a variety of classroom resources, we are able to give a sense of familiarity to the home environment and help ease certain anxieties. In order to help keep our students both mentally and physically stimulated, several websites are sent to them on a weekly basis.

The COVID-19 pandemic has encouraged our team to adapt our methods of communication in innovative ways. Staying connected to one another virtually has proven to brighten up our days of isolation. We are using several social media platforms to spread positivity not only to our students but to the staff members as well! We

share projects on social media on a weekly basis: painting and drawing, baking, finding creative ways to make music together, creating theatrical videos with the incorporation of English Language Arts, seeing our therapeutic furry friends, and staying physically active.

Galileo SIS students will continue practicing their theatre skills with Yellowbug Theatre School by creating monologues and scenes. Our student Alex Ponte even created a video outlining the role that Galileo plays in his life and how dearly he misses his teachers and peers.

Uncertainty is an especially big challenge for our population. Sometimes our virtual chats only relieve or comfort them to a certain extent, so concrete schedules and time frames can help ease their anxieties.

We will continue to support our students throughout this journey. We will continue in our life is suspended: love, spring and sunshine are not cancelled; reading, imagination and music are not cancelled; conversations are not cancelled; and most importantly, hope is not cancelled!

Watch Alex Ponte's video here:

<https://youtu.be/Lg3IJFFhVNo>

Watch Lisa Trotto's video here:

<https://youtu.be/-DYllRomaRU>

Lisa Trotto is an SIS teacher and Erica Onofrio is an art therapist at Galileo Adult Education Centre.



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## Mindfulness 101: Timely tips for parents and students

By Danika Swanson

Mindfulness practices can provide us with doable and accessible tools to help manage stress, anxiety and uncertainty, especially during these challenging times. Mindfulness means paying attention to the present moment, on purpose, with curiosity and without judgement. You can pay attention to whatever you are experiencing, including anything you experience with your senses (touch, taste, sight, sound, and smell), your thoughts, physical sensations, and your emotions.

### Why mindfulness?

While mindfulness is relatively new in an educational setting with youth, over 30 years of research has shown a range of benefits of mindfulness in adults including decreased stress, chronic pain and increased emotional and mental well-being. Newer studies on mindfulness with children and in education find that learning mindfulness benefits students in terms of improved attention; empathy and understanding of others; emotion regulation; social skills; behaviour in school; test anxiety and stress.

### How to practice mindfulness?

One way to begin integrating mindfulness into your home lives, is to make mindfulness practice part of your daily routine – taking some time before bed, before homework, or before screen time. In my family, we start the day with a morning circle that includes a “mindful moment.” Pick a time that works for you and your kids, and be consistent in terms of the time, place, and length of practice (one to three minutes is a goal). Keep it simple, especially early on.

If a formal or scheduled practice doesn't work for you, you can try observing small moments of mindfulness throughout your day. Pause for a few mindful breaths, or ask your child to “notice what you are feeling

[http://www.mindfulschools.org/about-mindfulness/research/;](http://www.mindfulschools.org/about-mindfulness/research/)

<http://journal.frontiersin.org/article/10.3389/fpsyg.2014.00603/full>



Photo, Jyotirmoy Gupta on Unsplash

right now.” Even these brief pauses can help to shift our state, calm our nervous system, and encourage greater awareness.

### Mindful bodies:

When we do a formal mindfulness practice with students, we always start by asking them to assume a posture called “mindful body.”

- Become still, quiet, gentle, and considerate of those around you.
- Let your back be straight without being rigid.
- Rest your hands calmly in your lap or on the table in front of you.
- Let your eyes close. (If children are uncomfortable closing their eyes, they can gaze softly in front of them.)
- Let all movement slowly come to a still place, so that you are really prepared to focus your attention.
- Spend one minute in a mindful body.

### Mindful breathing:

Mindful breathing can be done anytime: before bed, waiting in line or for a Zoom meeting to start, when frustrated or excited, while thinking, even while watching TV.

- Get into a mindful body and let your eyes close.
- Place your hand on your belly (or wherever you feel your breath the clearest – maybe your chest or at your nose).
- Notice the sensations as you breathe in and out.
- Try to continue noticing every breath for one to three minutes.
- If you find that you started thinking, simply notice it and return your attention to the next breath.

Danika Swanson is the consultant for the Spiritual and Community Animation Service at the English Montreal School Board and was trained by Mindful Schools to teach mindfulness to students in K-12.



## Assistive Technology @ home

By Andrea Prupas and Olivia Colalillo

These days, using assistive technology (AT) for learning means that you can use it anywhere. And that's a huge bonus, especially during the stay-at-home orders during COVID-19. Whether you are using AT installed on your device at home or accessing it via the web, there are many options for students to continue to learn at home with the individualized support that they need.

With that in mind, we wanted to answer some "frequently asked questions" that we have received recently regarding use of AT at home, and recommend our top picks of some excellent free tools and resources.

### My child needs to have text read out loud. What tools are available to help?

**Text-to-speech** reads text on the screen out loud. There are many ways to do this:

- **Built-in text-to-speech:** An easy option is to use the tools that are already available on your device ([iPad](#), [Mac](#) or [PC](#)).
- **Text-to-speech available within your e-learning tools:** Many school boards in Quebec now provide access to computing, collaboration and learning tools in the cloud for teachers and students. GSuite for education sectors

and Microsoft Office 365 are popular options, and both include access to text to speech through their apps for writing or with Chrome apps and extensions. For example, [Read&Write for Google Chrome](#) and [Immersive Reader in Microsoft WordOnline](#) are available as assistive technologies for students.

- **Text-to-speech top pick:** With the [Microsoft Office Lens app](#) on a mobile device, you can scan and read quickly and easily. Office Lens (iOS, Android) provides students, teachers or parents with the option to take a picture of a page, then have it read out loud instantly. The app made an important update recently, and now all Immersive Reader features (text to speech, wide text spacing, text highlighting and even a Boardmaker picture dictionary!) are included in the app.

### My child benefits from listening to audiobooks and/or needs to read with the support of highlighted text and audio feedback. What are some options?

Luckily, there are many options to read in different ways. Many school boards now offer audio and/or highlighted text through

their portals or virtual libraries. In addition, many companies are offering free access to audiobook collections. Our favourite trend is authors reading their own books. Be sure to turn on the closed captions for the text to be displayed on the screen as they read for added reading accessibility! [See our post](#) for free resources.

**Audiobook top pick:** Visit [StoryLine Online](#) to listen to actors reading from their favourite books.

### My child needs visuals for support at home. What kinds of assistive technology can I use to access or make visuals?

Visuals can be a very important resource for many students and their families, especially during this time when our regular routines have been disrupted. Families might want to create visual schedules, choice boards or communication boards to help their children maintain a routine, clarify verbal language or communicate. There are many free resources ranging from simple (e.g. [Connectability](#), [Picto4Me](#) and [LessonPix](#) clip art are free visuals engines) to many more options ([BoardmakerOnline](#) is offering families a free 90-day trial). For inspiration, you can visit the [Geneva Centre](#) for Autism's Visuals



Photo, [Pexels.com](#)

Gallery. [See our post](#) for more information on accessing and creating visuals.

**Visuals top pick:** Jordan Smith, our dedicated and much-missed colleague, created a social story to help our students feel at ease with managing the coronavirus. Please see her work on p6 of this edition; it is a wonderful resource for families.

We hope to be back at our schools soon, but in the meantime you can always reach us virtually. Stay safe everyone!

Andrea Prupas and Olivia Colalillo are Assistive and Accessible Technology consultants at the English Montreal School Board. Connect with them on Twitter: @AndreaPrupas @OliviaColalillo or online at [emsb.org](#).

## 'It's okay to not be okay'

### Giant Steps supports parents and students with autism

By Randy Pinsky

"I miss the noise and all the action," confided Marla Cable, coordinator of Giant Steps (GS) Resource and Training Centre. In our current situation, parents the world over are struggling to find creative ways of working remotely while homeschooling their children.

But what about families of children with autism who rely on a complex array of resources and educators and are overwhelmed with trying to do the tasks of multiple specialists?

The Giant Steps team was determined that parents not feel alone in this time. They quickly got into gear with online classes, exercises and videos. Cable noted, "I have always been very proud of our school and our staff. They're creative and think outside of the box. But they've really upped the ante here."

Social narratives which explain the situation allow students to express their feelings, reducing anxiety and the fear of the unknown. The school is emphasizing teaching life

skills such as household chores and cooking over academics, which cultivate self-reliance and independence.

Many of the staff connect with their students regularly and have created personalized videos that they can watch over and over. They regularly check in with the families, providing an invaluable resource for parents who are often unprepared to be full-time educators. Families have access to a common calendar of activities and can take part in whatever entices them, from science experiments to arts and crafts.

"There is this fallacy that people with autism are anti-social and don't want to engage with people. They need social interaction like we do; just at a different level," said Cable. "A few parents have sent videos of their kids watching the staff videos. I can only say, I cried. The kids were so happy to see the staff and engage with them."

In addition, each family virtually meets with the school's behavioral specialist and psychologist and has their numbers, just in case. There is also a mentorship program which matches parents with experienced counterparts who can offer advice and support. Setting realistic expectations and engaging in self-care are encouraged as are workshops on the "zones of regulation" approach for managing stress and anxiety.

Caregivers will at times fear that they might be judged if they express frustration or resentment. The GS staff have created safe spaces for self-expression so that parents can be their best for themselves and for their families. "It's okay to not be okay," reinforced Cable. "Our team is here for you."

Randy Pinsky is the leader of The Makuru Drummers, an Afro-Brazilian drum troupe who animate for community events.

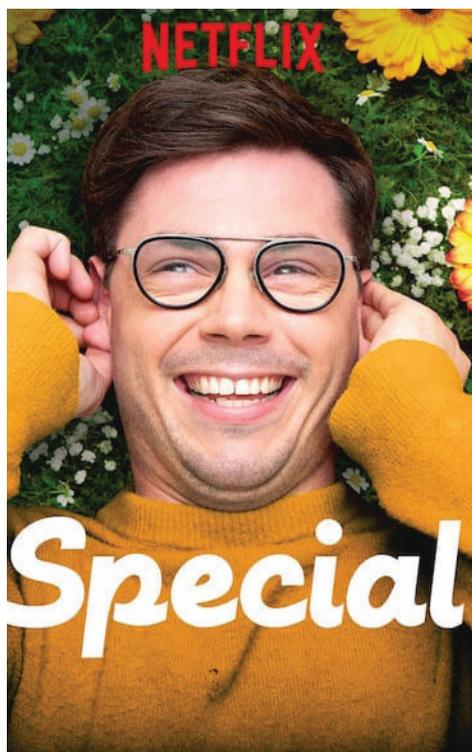


## Arts

# Netflix Roundup

Compiled by **Cindy Davis**  
Based on reviews by **Ishini Fernando**

Since none of us are going out much (or at all) these days, many of us have a lot of extra time on our hands to watch TV and movies at home. To help you with your search, *Inspirations* has rounded up our top Netflix picks with a connection to the special needs community:



### Special: And Other Lies We Tell Ourselves

Ryan O'Connell's *Special* is an eight-episode comedy series partially based on his memoir *I'm Special: And Other Lies We Tell Ourselves*. In the show, the protagonist, Ryan (played by O'Connell himself) has cerebral palsy and tries to distance himself from the label of his disability when he lands an internship as a writer for a website and his co-workers assume his limp is due

to a car accident. He moves out of the house he shares with his co-dependant mother and quickly makes friends in his new workplace. Viewers watch as Ryan awkwardly interacts with quirky personalities, struggles with everyday tasks living on his own, manages the enormous lie he's told everyone, handles his mean boss, and starts dating men for the first time. A comedy that looks at themes of self-acceptance, love, and sexuality, this series will have you both laughing and crying. Parental warning: contains sexual content.

### The Healing Powers of Dude

This original Netflix family comedy series created by Sam Litzenberg-Weisberg and Erica Spates, centers on Noah (played by Jake Chapman), an 11-year-old with social anxiety disorder integrating into public school after having been homeschooled for two years. After immediately having a negative encounter with a classmate, Amara, (played by Sophie Kim) who uses a wheelchair, Noah's parents decide to get him an emotional support dog named Dude to help him cope better with his anxiety. Dude, however, turns out to be hyperactive, easily distracted, and a bit of a troublemaker - and hilarity ensues. Noah ends up befriending Amara as well as another classmate, Simon. With new friends and his dog, Dude, by his side, Noah is prepared for the adventure of middle school. Although a children's show, *The Healing Powers of Dude* does a great job at discussing difficult topics, including dealing with mental illness, in order to encourage kids to talk about their struggles to adults they trust.

### The Lighthouse of the Orcas

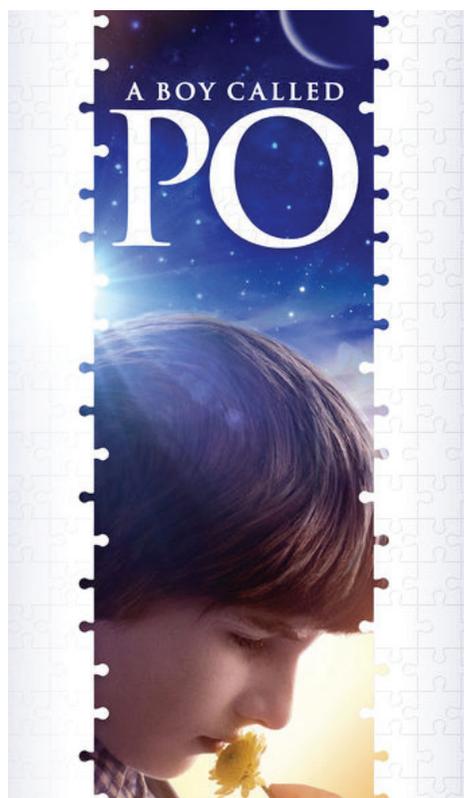
Gerardo Olivares' 2016 Argentinean film is based on a true story by Roberto "Beto" Bubas, a park ranger from Patagonia, who feels profoundly at peace in close proximity to killer whales. Played by Joaquín Furriel, Beto's life is disrupted when a woman named Lola and her autistic son Tristan turn



up on his doorstep. Lola felt compelled to travel with her son to Spain to meet Beto, after Tristan was drawn in by a documentary on Beto and his connection to killer whales. Lola, who had witnessed Tristan becoming emotionally distant after his father had left them, wanted to have him see the orcas himself. Though at first Beto refuses to help them, he soon grows fond of the boy and his mother and the three embark on a journey of healing. This film is a lovely story of hope that also explains some of the complexities of autism, against the spectacular backdrop of Patagonia. This film is in Spanish with English subtitles.

### A Boy Called Po

Josh Asher's 2016 film tells the story of a newly widowed engineer and father, David, and his autistic son, Po. David, played by



Christopher Gorham, struggles to perform at his high-pressured job while grieving the loss of his wife and caring for his son.

Though a brilliant student, Po, played by Julian Feder, is seen throughout the film to drift into his own mind. He wanders off on his own, gets himself into dangerous situations, and is bullied at school, creating increased worry for his father. This film is both a touching and educational film with a powerful storyline as well as in-depth descriptions of certain therapies. The relationship between David and Po gives viewers an idea of some of the challenges and pressures faced by a parent of a child with autism. For anyone who is not familiar with autism spectrum disorder, this movie can also be enlightening.

### The Fundamentals of Caring

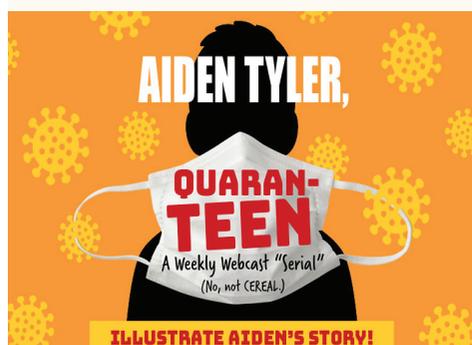
Robert Burnett's *The Fundamentals of Caring*, adapted from a novel by Jonathan Evison, tells the story of Ben, played by Paul Rudd, a retired writer coping with grief after a tragedy. After taking a caregiving course, Ben becomes the caregiver of a teenage boy named Trevor with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. Trevor, played by Craig Roberts, does not make it easy for Ben. With his penchant for dark humour and wicked pranks, he gives Ben a nightmarish start, but the two eventually form an entertaining friendship. They eventually take a road trip and their relationship deepens to that of a father-son. Parents should be aware that the film does contain some foul language and adult themes. The movie is lighthearted despite serious themes, and though it only explores issues slightly below the surface, it is very enjoyable to watch.





## Online resources for reading (and listening) at home

By Alissa Rosellini



As soon as schools closed, many authors, publishers, and libraries went into high gear to offer resources to support families during this challenging time. As a librarian, I have been trained to organize information, but even I have been overwhelmed by the number of amazing resources that have been shared in the last few weeks! Here are a few of my favourite free resources to keep children and teens engaged with reading and stories:

### For all ages

**Aiden Tyler, *Quaran-teen*** Author Rex Ogle has started writing a new series, aimed at students in grades 4-8, about a young teen going through school closures due to the coronavirus. Each week, he writes new chapters and reads them aloud online. Note: chapters can also be downloaded and read. <https://www.juniorlibraryguild.com/quaran-teen>

**Audible Stories** This special collection from Audible offers audiobooks for kids of all ages, from toddlers to teens. Audiobooks are offered in six languages: English, French, German, Italian, Japanese and Spanish. <https://stories.audible.com/start-listen>

**Everywhere Book Fest**, coming up on May 1 and 2, came together organically just a few weeks ago! From picture books to young adult novels, there will be something for everyone. <https://everywherebookfest.com/>

### For elementary students

**Coronavirus: A Book for Children** Do your children love the pictures from *The Gruffalo*? The publisher Nosy Crow has collaborated with a team, including Axel Scheffler, *The Gruffalo* illustrator, to produce a straightforward, reassuring book about the coronavirus.

<https://nosycrow.com/blog/released-to-day-free-information-book-explaining-coronavirus-children-illustrated-gruffalo-illustrator-axel-scheffler/>

**Heure du Conte** This rich French resource, put together by L'Association des bibliothèques publiques du Québec (ABPQ), includes recorded storytimes as well as a calendar of upcoming live storytimes.

<https://heureduconte.ca/>

### For high school students

**Sync:** From April 30 until July 29, 2020, teens can use the Sora app to access two free audiobooks per week! For specific set-up information, see the FAQ portion of the website.

<https://www.audiobooksync.com/>

**YALLSTAYHOME:** This festival for fans of young adult literature was held online on April 25 and 26 and featured over 70 authors! Recordings from the author panels will be available soon.

<https://www.yallwest.com/>

Don't forget that school and public libraries offer many digital resources as well! For example, residents of Quebec can sign up and use the extensive online resources of the BAnQ (Bibliothèque et Archives nationales du Québec).

<https://www.banq.qc.ca/formulaires/abonnement/index.html>

*Alissa Rosellini is a board librarian with the English Montreal School Board.*

## Cummings Centre provides free access to its Virtual Learning Library

By Janice Besner

To help break social isolation, the Cummings Centre is offering free access to its online library featuring over 150 English and French-language videos on-demand to the community-at-large. The Virtual Learning Library funded by the Leonard Albert Family Foundation houses previously recorded videos of past Cummings lectures, blockbuster events and classes from experts in the field of well-aging. Topics include music, art, exercise, entertainment, politics, travel and more!

### Adapted exercises classes, sing-alongs available online

"As an organization, we never expected to be living through these unprecedented times," said Maria Fragapane, supervisor of Adapted Fitness and Wellness at the Cummings Centre. "Our primary objective has always been to provide customized health and wellness programs to older adults. Although our mission has not changed because of these critical circumstances, we have definitely adjusted the way in which we deliver our programming to comply with social distancing recommendations. We are leveraging technology such as expanding our video library to include more online classes, emailing and FaceTiming with members. We're also using 'old school approaches' such as letter writing and care calls to keep our participants connected, engaged and physically active. So far the response is really positive and we feel that we are contributing by helping them to stay motivated and on track."

The Wellness Centre has worked to provide members and non-members alike with free on-line exercise class options that can be done at home. These classes include adapted programs for participants whether following a stroke, progressive neuromuscular disorders (Parkinson's disease, Multiple Sclerosis) or other health challenges.

Victoria McNeil is a music therapist and staff member at the Cummings Centre and

Exercise for Multiple Sclerosis with Maria Fragapane



stresses that singing together is the key to cognitive and emotional health for many individuals. "I knew I needed to provide a service to our program participants once the Centre's program closures hit. The Virtual Library was the perfect platform to ensure that I could reach as many Cummings members as possible in their homes. A little bit can go a long way where music making is concerned. Taking time to breathe and feel a little music in your body helps calm our nervous systems, boosts cognitive function, and allows us a moment to play," she said. McNeil's Happy Hour Ukulele Club winter sessions ended prematurely due to the shutdown. She has been sending her club members instructional videos so they can continue to master their skills.

"Ultimately, we are doing our best to keep our participants connected, engaged and physically active," added Fragapane. "Hopefully we're succeeding in helping them stay motivated and on track with on-line exercise program support."

*New videos are uploaded weekly. Individuals can sign up for free at [www.cummingscentre.org/virtual-learning](http://www.cummingscentre.org/virtual-learning)*

*Janice Besner is the Communications, Marketing and Membership manager at the Cummings Centre.*



Commission scolaire English-Montréal

English Montreal School Board

Classes may be on hold due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but our online educational space is keeping students focused on pedagogy.

Websites and resources are hand-picked by our teams of educational consultants and professionals. We're adding new activities each week for our students from Pre-K to Secondary 5 as well as those with special needs.

Resources for Students with Special Needs  
Content based on the Quebec Education Plan  
Weekly Educational Activities & Learning Kits  
Activities for the Special Needs community  
Support for Parents



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