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INSPIRATIONS

Promoting inclusion and mental well-being / Promouvoir l'inclusion et le mieux-être mental



SUMMER FUN!

SLEEP FOR
SUCCESS

SUPPORT GROUP
A BLESSING
TO MOMS



From left: Wagar Adult Education Centre students Jessica Teixeira-Pinto, Antoine Chu and Juanna Iggyook-Onningnak participate in a painting workshop at the Visual Arts Centre in Westmount on March 24 as part of the upcoming English Montreal School Board Art Co-op program. See p. 35.
Photo: Inspirations



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Editor's message

Kristin McNeill

As we continue our foray into offering stories that address mental health and well-being, we put a spotlight on sleep in this edition. Special guest and sleep expert, Dr. Reut Gruber has contributed an article on the importance of sleep for healthy cognitive and physical functioning of children and adolescents. Plus, our very own Tania Piperni, autism spectrum disorder consultant at the English Montreal School Board, writes about a school health promotion program that incorporates best practices in sleep.

Our team of writers continues to bring you informative, positive and inspiring stories from the community and beyond. Jordan Stoopler writes about Avalanche Kidz, a new hockey skills development program based out of NDG for children with special needs. Nicole Proano introduces us to Power Buddies, an organization founded by three young Montrealers who have started a group for neurodivergent young adults which meets regularly to participate in a physical activity or excursion. A mom's support group is described by Lorri Benedik, who interviewed one of the members to learn how the group was formed and how it became such an important pillar of support among these mothers. These are just a sampling of the community stories you will read about in this edition.

We would also like to introduce Elisabeth Prass, newly elected MNA for D'Arcy-McGee, whose extensive dossier as official opposition critic includes people living with a disability or with autism spectrum disorder. *Inspirations* has traditionally reserved this space for an elected representative, whose focus is on advocacy for the special needs community, to write about issues, plans and legislation affecting it.

This edition's Simon Chang Difference Maker is Tyson Taylor, who runs the Leaps and Bound Center, a camp for people with autism, developmental delays or intellectual disabilities.

We hope you enjoy this edition and look forward to your comments!

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Tyson Taylor makes a difference with Leaps and Bounds

by *Randy Pinsky*

With years of experience working with special needs kids and with youth with behavioural challenges in group homes, Tyson Taylor lamented the limited sports options available to this clientele. He decided to do something about it. Enter Leaps and Bounds Center, an inclusive summer sports camp for individuals seven years and older with autism, developmental delays or intellectual disabilities. Now in its sixth year, the organization has expanded to offer activities year-round that promote team-building and a sense of belonging.

Leaps and Bounds Center adapts sport activities to campers' abilities, believing that physical activity and exercise are an integral part of a healthy lifestyle. Options include soccer, tennis, basketball, swimming (in the summer) and pickleball to name a few. Campers enjoy time spent on indoor fields as well as in the classrooms and outdoor spaces at the CDL Club Sportif Côte de Liesse in Saint-Laurent.

The Julien family connected with Taylor upon the recommendation of Summit School social worker Annette Perry. She suggested that their 16-year-old son TJ attend the camp to build confidence and independence.

When TJ's father David saw how happy his non-verbal autistic son was after activities, he was inspired to nominate Taylor for the Simon Chang Difference Maker Award. And his nomination was based on more than that. "Talking with Tyson and realizing all the amazing resources he had pulled

together, and how quickly this was scaling up – that [is what] makes him a true difference maker in the community."

"This is a great honour. It just came out of the blue!" exclaimed Taylor. "I was even hesitant starting this years ago." The camp has grown from the original nine campers to 40, with a waitlist.

According to Julien, there is something special about Taylor. "It's his intuition, the way he greets the kids." Rather than focusing on their limitations, the team of experienced educators accentuates their abilities, encouraging self-confidence and skill-building.

"Tyson just gets it, and makes everything look easy," said Julien in his nomination.

"To help people with disabilities, it takes a community that is [not only] empathetic and generous, but that is also able to challenge them on their own terms," he said.

Several well-known athletes with attention deficit and hyperactivity disorder have been known to leverage their special skills. *ADDitude Magazine* explained how swimmer Michael Phelps was the first American to win eight medals in a single Olympic Games, and Olympic hockey player Cammi Granato's ability to quickly react to external stimuli made her a menace on the ice.

Leaps and Bounds has expanded from a summer camp to also include spring break activities and multi-sport Saturdays. All are held at the Club CDL.

With the right motivation and support, Taylor believes there is no limit to what kids can do, which was the inspiration behind the name Leaps and Bounds. In fact, he is even hiring former campers, many of whom were asked to leave other camps before finally finding their place at his. Providing them with responsibilities and expectations is key for seeing change in themselves and towards others, Taylor said.



"It is so special to see how far they've come," he shared.

"This is all possible due to the support of CDL's executive director, Lloyd Prizant, who has been an incredible partner to us as we grow."

Simon Chang, his business partner Faye Swift and this edition's prize sponsor Sandy Tedford were inspired by Taylor's determination, the way he cares for his clients and the positive example he is setting with his work at Leaps and Bounds. Chang was pleased to name Taylor as this edition's Difference Maker.

The Simon Chang Foundation for Change will be providing funds to send underprivileged youth to the camp this summer, thanks to the generosity and support of donor Tedford.

"I fully support Tyson's mission and am honoured to help provide campers with an experience they may not otherwise be able to have—an opportunity for a summer of exploring, sharing, growth and adventure," said Chang.

Julien is grateful to have discovered the camp, which he describes as something very rare in the special needs community where young adults can develop a sense of character and identity. "My son has changed. His whole way has brightened," he stated in the nomination. "TJ may not speak, but you can read him, so to see him visibly happy and engaged means the world to me as a parent." ■

Leaps and Bounds Center summer camp runs for eight weeks at the CDL Club Sportif Côte de Liesse. For more info: 438.397.9766 or leapsandboundscenter@outlook.com.

Nominate your Difference Maker at info@inspirationsnews.com.



From left: TJ, Tyson Taylor, Simon Chang and David Julien outside of the Leaps and Bounds Center at CDL Club Sportif on March 25. Photo: Wendy Singer



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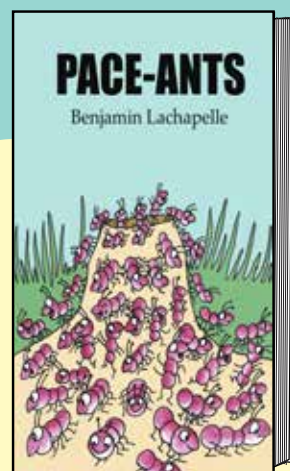


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Friends join forces to **make a difference**

Simon Chang and his dear friend Sandy Tedford have a standing phone call every Sunday to talk about their week, their lives and their worlds. Simon lives and works in Montreal while Sandy has retired and now calls the Dominican Republic home. “Sandy starts off each phone call saying, ‘Tell me the good news,’ to ensure that our conversations are upbeat,” said Simon. “We share ideas and talk about the world.”



Sandy Tedford, left, and Simon Chang get together in San Francisco in 2015. Photo courtesy of S. Chang

One recent Sunday, the discussion turned to Simon's philanthropy, and Sandy surprised him by saying that she'd like to support his Foundation's efforts to recognize special people who are making a difference in the world.

Sandy is proud to partner with her friend as a sponsor of this edition of *Inspirations'* Simon Chang Difference Maker award, recognizing Tyson Taylor of Leaps and

Bounds Center for people seven years and older with autism, developmental delays or intellectual disabilities.

Having had a very successful career as an international fashion buyer, Sandy is pleased to be able to give back in a way that encourages and honours positivity in the world. Her generosity, paired with the Simon Chang Foundation for Change, will make it possible for many young people to experience the Leaps and Bounds summer camp this year.

The two have been friends for nearly 50 years. They met early in the 1970s at the beginning of their careers when they both worked for the Hudson's Bay Company buying office in Montreal, where Sandy was a fashion buyer and Simon a graphic designer. The two had an instant connection because of their similar outlooks and interests – a passion for fashion, films, travel and a love of discovering new things. Both are extremely inquisitive and independent people who celebrate creativity and uniqueness.

“Simon and I are both grateful for our successful careers and happy lives, especially since we have always remained true to our individuality and personal beliefs,” said

Sandy. “I'm supporting Simon's Foundation because it focuses its work to help individuals march to the beat of their own drum and who are changing the world in their unique and special way.”

At the peak of her career, Sandy's home base was Hong Kong, which conveniently afforded much time to spend with Simon since his fashion business required him to regularly split his time between Montreal and Hong Kong. Over the years, the friends have been regular travel companions exploring the globe.

Simon and Sandy set an admirable example of a true friendship that has thrived on mutual respect and support, a quirky sense of humour, an appreciation for a changing world and all that it encompasses, but most of all for the belief that life is full of possibilities and that we have the power within us to create our own lives and bring positivity to the world and impact others. ■



TECC and Chang work together

by *Wendy Singer*



From left: Ralph Odone, Liam Boucher, Simon Chang, Zachary Kruse and Joshua Cunningham filming at Chang's showroom on January 26. Photo: Etienne Béland, Pickle Creative Agency

Simon Chang was introduced to Summit School and their Transitional Education and Career Center (TECC) through his philanthropic work with *Inspirations*. TECC's Video Model Productions program, which provides students the opportunity to gain practical experience in film and video production, caught his attention. Chang has a passion for film and an understanding of the importance of using video as a marketing tool.

This winter, Chang teamed up with teacher Liam Boucher and TECC students to produce a video series entitled “A to Z with Simon Chang.” The 26 short videos pair each letter of the alphabet with a special meaning, for example A for Ambition, B for Believe, C for Commitment.

Filming took place at Chang's atelier on Chabanel, marking the program's first venture outside the school premises. “It was a real day's work with filming and set changes. It was amazing to see how quickly our team was able to work and adapt,” said Boucher.

“The students were proud to be working on location in a professional environment,” said Chang. “This is real-life experience!”

Chang walked the students through his atelier and shared stories of his career. This afforded him the opportunity to get to know the students. Zoë Fellahi, for example, enjoyed showing her sketches to Chang and viewing his. Ralph Odone was impressed to learn about Chang's giving spirit. “It makes me happy to encourage young people to develop their talents and abilities,” said Chang. “Their enthusiasm is refreshing.”

In recognition of the collaboration, The Simon Chang Foundation for Change will contribute to TECC's Video Model Productions program. ■

Stay tuned as Chang rolls out his “A to Z” videos on his social media feeds.

Summer fun is on the way!

by Wendy Singer

During the snowy winter months, we were thinking ahead to summer, and asked you where you like to go and what you like to do. We wanted to hear about your adventures. Here's a sampling of what you told us.

Canoe trips in the backcountry

Mackay Centre School of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) student River had a rough start, and he now experiences many challenges of a life living with cerebral palsy (CP). But right from the beginning, his parents decided that they wanted to get River out into the woods with them on their annual backcountry canoe trips. It's something they love to do and wanted to share with their kids, and at the same time, they wanted to prove to the world that even CP couldn't stop them from living a good life.

"River went on his first portage trip when he was only nine-weeks old! Now at age 12, River and his sister Sky have been on dozens of canoe-camping trips," said Anna Calvert, River's mother. "While the logistical puzzles have become more complex as River gets bigger, like how do we fit a wheelchair in the canoe, it's been totally worth the laughs and shared experiences as a family."

Calvert reports that their favourite canoe-tripping locations are Réserve faunique de Papineau-Labelle in Quebec, Algonquin Provincial Park and La Verendrye Provincial Park in Ontario.



River Fraser is seen here enjoying a canoe trip on crown land in the Canadian Shield region of central Ontario in 2022. Photo: A. Calvert

From May to August, Espoirs Laval offers inclusive cycling programs for all children aged five to 16, including those with physical disabilities or are neurodivergent. We were informed about this resource thanks to EMSB parent Julie Kristof – chair of the John Grant High School governing board – whose son races competitively with the Espoirs Laval team and whose daughter has disabilities.

Located at the Centre de la Nature in Laval, Espoirs Laval includes a day camp, a para-youth program and specialized training sessions on Mondays and Thursdays.

"In the world of cycling, there is a place for everyone," said Camille Desjardins-Leduc, assistant coach and head of para-cycling at Espoirs Laval. Desjardins-Leduc was named community coach of the year for Cycling Canada and Fédération Québécoise des sports cyclistes in 2022 for intro-

ducing the first para-cycling program for children in Quebec. She has made it her mission to improve bicycle accessibility for people living with disabilities.

Desjardins-Leduc explains that Espoirs Laval takes an inclusive approach to camp. Children participate in a group, with a companion available for personalized support. The day can include games, a hike, activities and of course, cycling. For longer rides, a child's bike can be attached to that of an animator.

Espoirs Laval has adapted bikes that can be rented during camp sessions. If the child would like to cycle afterwards at home, Desjardins-Leduc recommends renting an adapted bicycle through the Quebec government's adapted tricycles and bicycles rental program. Visit <https://tinyurl.com/yckvaerr>.

For information about Espoirs Laval, visit www.espoirlaval.ca.



Biking for all kids

Laura Sévigny cycling in the criterium Chirurgivision in Three Rivers in 2021, where she completed a 1.5-km course. Laura was the first paracyclist to cycle with Espoirs Laval. Photo courtesy of Le Nouvelliste

Treetop adventures

Last summer, Jason Goldsmith and his son Ellis, student at Wagar Adult Education Centre of the EMSB, visited Uplå in Mont-Saint-Grégoire. This labyrinth of

suspension bridges and trampolines connect to a network of unique and colourful treehouses, all of which are suspended in the air at the foot of the mountain. "It is unique and pretty amazing," said Goldsmith, who wanted to share his experience of Uplå for neurodivergent and neurotypical adventure seekers.

Uplå has an accessible entrance, and those in wheelchairs can travel around the site, however the netting is not recommended for those with mobility issues, explained Catherine Brunet-Collard, operations manager at the Quebec Arbraska park, which falls under the same ownership as other parks including Uplå and Treetop Trekking. Visit upla.ca for more information.



Jason, left, and Ellis Goldsmith having fun at Uplå in the summer of 2022. Photo courtesy of J. Goldsmith

Awesome moms

Support group a blessing to moms

by *Lorri Benedik*

Liz Blair is mom to Bruce, 23, a young adult with autism spectrum disorder, and Emma, 25. From the time he was small, Blair has accompanied her son to activities designed for kids with special needs. She'd sit on the sidelines watching his tennis lessons, her head swiveling left to right. During swimming classes her eyes followed Bruce doing laps in the pool. There were always other parents doing the same.

In 2015 a lightbulb flickered on. "It was the last tennis session of the season, and one mom had brought a box of cookies for all of us to share," said Blair. "We got to talking, and someone suggested we meet for coffee." The women exchanged phone numbers and email addresses. When tennis lessons started up again, they arranged for a few of them to go for a walk while one stayed behind to ensure the kids were alright. If a child was struggling, the on-duty mom would send a text message, and the walkers would return.

A bond developed between the women, and they began meeting for dinner every couple of months. Over time, more moms were invited to join. "It was great to have friends who understood the joys and challenges of parenting children like ours," said Blair. "We got to know each other's kids too and would celebrate their achievements and birthdays."

New Year's Eve get-togethers became a yearly ritual for the mothers, along with their kids and other family members. "Staying up until midnight was not something our children cared to do," Blair said. "We would meet at a local restaurant, for an early dinner, enjoy good food in a festive atmosphere and everyone was home by 10 p.m."

When Covid-19 hit the women adapted to the new reality. They formed a Facebook Messenger group called the "Super Special Moms" and organized regular video chats.

"One of the best things about the mom group is how we share our experience and resources," Blair said. "We learn so much from each other." When the first of their



Several members of the "Super Special Moms" meet at a restaurant on the boardwalk in Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue in 2019. Photo courtesy of L. Blair

kids turned 18 the others leaned in and took note of precious info about social services and government subsidies. They were blown away to learn that some banks offer service charge exemptions to special needs adults.

The support did not end with their kids. When one of the mom's close family members was in a car accident, the group banded together to "fill her freezer" with casseroles and spaghetti sauce.

"What I think is most special about the group is how we focus on the positives and rejoice in our children's successes," Blair said. "We all shed tears of joy when one of our kids got into a college program and another got his first part-time job."

Blair describes the mom group as "a life-saver" and urges others to discard shyness and say hi to someone sitting close by at an activity. One never knows where it may lead. ■

Autism Canada's new community assistance program

According to Autism Canada, the average wait time for an autism assessment is 18 to 36 months and can cost \$3,000 or more. As a result, thousands of Canadian families have to wait to get a diagnosis and subsequently access targeted assistance or resources. With the aim of helping relieve the financial burden of assessments, Autism Canada has launched a financial assistance program, which subsidizes a portion of the

cost of assessment, therapy and respite not covered by provincial health plans. Autism Canada is a Canadian autism advocacy organization with a national perspective that provides tools and resources for families who have a member on the autism spectrum.

For info, go to www.autismcanada.org.

- Randy Pinsky



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Selwood wins award for trailblazing work at the Fairmont

by *Nicole Proano*

The setting where Derek Selwood found out he'd been nominated and won the *Inspirations* Entrepreneurial Award was fitting given the nature of it. The award, sponsored by Henry Zavriyev, recognizes outstanding individuals in the special needs community who are excelling at their job, provide a valuable service or who have demonstrated an entrepreneurial spirit.

Selwood, 52, was on break from his job in the laundry department at the hotel Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth when he pulled out his phone to discover the happy news in an email. "It was quite the surprise," he said. "It was something I really wasn't expecting, but it was nice to get the recognition that I really did play quite the role in the whole program."

Selwood became the first Polaris Enterprise program employee at the Fairmont in June 2022. His trailblazing tenure has

been such a hit that the hotel hired more autistic people, with plans to continue. The assistant director of housekeeping at the Fairmont, Sylvie Brkovic, said it's all because of Selwood. "It was a huge success in our department, in our hotel," she said. "It's because of him, his character, the way he is. He showed us that we can all do it. We can all adapt to help each other."

When Selwood first joined Polaris, an employment readiness and vocational program run by Giant Steps in collaboration with Loblaws, he was pleasantly surprised to discover Fabienne Presentey would be his job coach. Selwood and Presentey had met 10 years prior, when he was first diagnosed with autism. The two worked together closely throughout some of that time, including when Selwood endeavoured to start his own furniture refurbishing company.

Now, Presentey says she's thrilled to witness how far Selwood has come since they first met. "Honest, humility and hard work," she said is how she would describe him. "This man has harnessed all of that and he continues to be determined. I'm just really thrilled that this worked out for him."



Fabienne Presentey, left, and Derek Selwood at the Fairmont The Queen Elizabeth Hotel on October 27. Photo courtesy of Giant Steps

In his free time, Selwood enjoys reading books about automobiles, watching Formula One races, taking long walks along the canal and spending time with friends. Refurbishing remains a favourite hobby and, in the future, he hopes to put his Diploma of Vocational Studies certificate in furniture finishing from Rosemount

Technology Centre back to use on a part-time basis. And with a bit of his own advice, it's only a matter of time. "Believe in yourself and surround yourself with people who really believe in your abilities," Selwood said. "If you can think it, you can do it." ■

Nominate your entrepreneur at info@inspirationsnews.com.

Entrepreneur to dress for success!

Benoit Labrèche (right) was recognized with the Entrepreneurial Award in our Fall 2022 edition of *Inspirations*. On February 20, he met with Louis Ialenti (left) at Maison Cloakroom in downtown Montreal, where he was fitted for a tailor-made suit that will help him dress for success at interviews and while pursuing future business endeavours. "I've never been fitted with a new suit, and I am humbled for having been given such an experience," said Labrèche. "I can't wait to proudly wear such a beautiful suit. I hope this will allow me to realize my future dreams." Ialenti is the founder of Maison Cloakroom. Photo: Wendy Singer



Social Tree Foundation offers career guidance via web platform

Are you or someone you know an autistic adult or student looking for career advice? The Social Tree's new Untapped Talent initiative is a free program, aiming to "provide guidance and a better understanding of the different career paths for individuals on the autism spectrum." A virtual event on January 25 featured discussions on self-advocacy, career options and inclusive workplaces. Topics planned for future events include personal triumphs and challenges, recommendations for skill development, advice on changing careers and discussions about disclosure. The organization was planning a second event for April. For information: www.thesocialtreeautism.org/untapped-talent.

– Randy Pinsky

CDSS, LinkedIn create Inployable

by *Randy Pinsky*

According to the Canadian Down Syndrome Society (CDSS), people with Down syndrome (DS) tend to be either unemployed, unpaid or underpaid in work, a situation the organization is determined to address. Working with LinkedIn, it launched Inployable, a dedicated space where job seekers with DS and inclusive employers can connect, recruit and job hunt. The space, launched in October 2022, enables candidates to showcase their unique abilities, making it easier for inclusive companies to connect with them.

“The Canadian Down Syndrome Society is committed to ensuring that the Down syndrome community in Canada is valued, supported and that individuals with Down syndrome are given equitable opportunities to contribute to society as fully participating citizens,” the organization noted in a 2020 position statement on employment. The team offers an Employment Planning Hub packed with resources for both employees and employers.

In a recently released promotional video, Inployable reported that North America is currently experiencing an unprecedented labour shortage. As one participant with DS shared, “There are 1 million open jobs in Canada, yet over 50 percent of people with Down syndrome can’t get a job.” Another one retorted, “What’s up with that?”

A long-overlooked potential solution is the DS community. Employers might hesitate to hire people with special needs due to assumed additional investment in accommodations or training. The Presidents Group, a network of business leaders in British Columbia pushing for more inclusive workplaces, however, has found that 58 percent of needed accommodations are free, with 37 percent requiring a one-time expense, as noted on their site accessibleemployers.ca.

“Accessibility and hiring people with disabilities has always been good for business,” it reported, stating that diverse workplaces are six times more likely to be innovative

and effectively anticipate change, and twice as likely to meet or exceed financial targets.

Yet, “employers aren’t looking for people like me,” an Inployable participant said.

Those who are employed tend to work in what the National Center on Health, Physical Activity and Disability in the US refers to as the five “F” job categories: Food (kitchen work), factories (assembling), filth (janitorial services), flowers (florists and landscaping) and filing (mail delivery).

The Canadian Down Syndrome Society expressed the desire for people with DS to earn equal benefits and be given the opportunity to work alongside individuals of all abilities.

“People with Down syndrome want to be part of the world,” stated CDSS executive director Laura LaChance in an interview.

According to the CDSS, inclusive workplaces contribute to enhanced team

morale, collective productivity and greater retention, making it a beneficial business strategy for all.

Inployable was thus created to bridge potential employees with inclusive companies. As one participant reflected, “employers [didn’t] even know where to find me – until now.”

Upon creating a LinkedIn profile, coaches are available to help individuals showcase marketable skill sets such as customer service or team morale. They also help determine if the job seeker prefers repetitive tasks and if they are routine-oriented. Employers can then browse through the profiles and contact potential new hires.

With greater moves towards equity, diversity and inclusion, Inployable is helping challenge assumptions about ability. “There’s a lot of myth-busting that still needs to happen,” noted LaChance, “but these are small steps of change in the right direction.” ■

Giant Steps partners with St-Hubert restaurants to promote autism inclusivity

by *Jordan Stoopler*

A multi-faceted pilot project is underway that will see an increased number of autistic employees hired across the St-Hubert restaurant organization, under the leadership of Giant Steps.

The project, funded by Fondation Autiste & majeur to help improve the quality of life of young adults on the autism spectrum, will see a dedicated project manager from Giant Steps work closely with stakeholders throughout Groupe St-Hubert and the St-Hubert Foundation to ensure that they are aware of and are implementing best practices in inclusive hiring.

Several Giant Steps students between the ages of 18 and 21 have already begun work placements that will teach them how to prepare and portion food as well as keep their individual workstations clean.

“It was important to create opportunities for the whole spectrum, whether the indi-

vidual had past work experience, needed onsite support in the form of job coaching or were further removed from the labour market,” said Andre Pereira, director of marketing and communications at Giant Steps, and project manager of employment initiatives. “The project will culminate with the creation and implementation of an industry-based adult education program at our new Giant Steps centre in September.”

Beyond the hiring of autistic individuals, Pereira said St-Hubert restaurants have also committed to instituting a more autism-inclusive guest experience for their customers.

“Whenever meeting with a new employer or partner, our objective is to always try to create a 360-degree, truly inclusive environment, featuring an employment component, but also including an enhanced customer experience for autistic individuals

and their families,” said Pereira. “With St-Hubert, we proposed several measures to enhance the restaurant experience, including training of staff on autism, an adapted environment in terms of lighting and music, but also created a sensory bag with sensory tools, noise cancelling headphones, stress balls, a time timer [a tool used to visualize and manage the passage of time] and a communication guide, among other items. On our website, we’ve helped create content to help better prepare for a visit, including visual guides and a virtual visit of a restaurant to highlight common features and help reduce levels of anxiety that may exist before a restaurant visit.”

It marks Giant Steps’ latest partnership with an industry leader, following similar initiatives with Loblaw Companies Ltd. (Maxi and Provigo in Quebec) and Fairmount Hotels, among others, in recent years. There have been hundreds of hires

facilitated by Giant Steps through direct partnerships and through the federally-funded Ready, Willing & Able (RWA) employment program, delivered in Quebec by Giant Steps. The employment program helps neurodivergent people access the labour market by educating employers on the business case for inclusive hiring and providing them with access to autistic job seekers. Additional support for the employee in the form of job coaching is also provided by RWA.

“It is about working with industry leaders in all sectors and creating a ripple effect,” said Pereira. “Our view is not just about our students, but about the community. We’re developing these partnerships with major organizations to create a real change and impact throughout the community.” ■

Getting the message across with video relay service

by *Anita Szabadi-Gottesman*

Connecting Deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals to optimize work, social networks and relationships remains a challenge in a sound-enhanced world. The internet-based video-conferencing non-profit, SRV Canada VRS, has been working since 2016 to change that. The service provides the hearing-impaired member with real-time sign language interpretation for telephone calls through an app.

In an interview with *Inspirations* using the video relay service (VRS), Ryan Duchoeny discussed his experience with this innovative technology. Deaf since the age of 18 months, Duchoeny has always found it challenging to communicate with doctors, other professionals and friends. “Using the VRS service, I can communicate in my first language, which is American Sign Language (ASL),” he said.

The free bilingual service is available 24 hours a day, every day of the year. The organization’s vision statement says the goal of the service is to “empower Deaf Canadians,” knowing that “access is opportunity.” To that end, so many daily tasks that the hearing world takes for granted are now fully accessible for the Deaf, leading to enhanced social connection and reducing isolation. The organization has a mandate from the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission to deliver the service in Canada. French speakers work with interpreters using Langues des signes québécoise (LSQ).

A customer service agent by day and an accomplished actor, having worked in film and commercials for 10 years and recently nominated for a local Ottawa actor-of-the-year award, Duchoeny appreciates the service to facilitate discussions in the workplace and with his talent manager. “I can access the VRS service from anywhere,

any time of day or night through the app on my phone,” he said. “I am very quickly connected with a sign-language interpreter who provides real-time interpretation for any telephone calls I need to make.”

Duchoeny commented that he has had only positive experiences so far using the service. “The interpreters do a great job, and I trust them completely to get my message across. The interpreter pops up on my screen, and we begin our conversation. The interpreter then speaks my words to the person on the line.” Once registered as a user, the VRS app can be downloaded for any IOS, Android, Windows and Mac with Safari and Firefox. ■

For more information: www.srvcanadavrs.ca.

Watch Mark Bergman's discussion with Ryan Duchoeny using the VRS service here: <https://inspirationsnews.com/inspirations/articles/the-challenges-of-being-a-deaf-actor-in-canada>.



Ryan Duchoeny, top, chats with Mark Bergman on the *Inspirations* News podcast in March about the challenges of being a Deaf actor. Photo: *Inspirations*

All Access Life goes to Vegas!

Bradley Heaven (middle left) and Dan O'Connor (to his right), co-founders of All Access Life, recently travelled to Las Vegas, Nevada and Orlando to attend the Consumer Electronics Show (CES). To their left is Gary Shapiro, president and CEO of the Consumer Technology Association, which hosts the conference every year, and (right) Stephen Ewell, executive director of the Consumer Technology Association Foundation. “We all agreed that it’s refreshing seeing more and more companies creating products with accessibility at the forefront of the design process and not as an afterthought. Everyone was equally amazed by all the life-changing technology that is currently being developed for people with disabilities and seniors!” said O'Connor. He stated it’s vital that people with disabilities and disability advocates attend CES to educate companies on how to make their technology more inclusive. Watch Heaven and O'Connor as they explore adaptive products on display: <https://youtu.be/XII-cD1yoRs>.

Photo courtesy of All Access Life



Survey to address impacts of pandemic on autism community

The 2023 Canadian Autism Needs Assessment (PANCAN Autism) Survey will help inform government, service organizations and members of the autism community of the evolving impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on autistic Canadians and their caregivers, according to Kathi Cosgrove, director, National Programs, Autism Speaks Canada. The project, funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada, is a

collaboration between Autism Speaks Canada, Autism Alliance of Canada and the McMaster Autism Research Team. The online survey is scheduled to launch in April or May 2023. “The future of autism policy must be informed by lived experience. Share yours and help us build a more inclusive Canada,” said Cosgrove. Email: PANCANAutism2023@outlook.com.

– Kristin McNeill



EMSB Database of Special Needs Resources

Consult our database on our website:

www.inspirationsnews.com/inspirations/resources

Increasing access to sound at John Rennie

by *Chris Webb and Tracey Green*

Fewer things are taken for granted than one's ability to use their senses to experience the world. For those requiring assistive listening devices, whether to treat a known hearing loss, or simply to overcome difficulties listening at a distance or in noise, the luxury of "hearing" and "listening" cannot be presumed. After a conversation with a student with hearing loss, who highlighted the poor acoustics in the 1960-era Louise Chalmers Theatre at John Rennie High School of the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB), increasing access to sound in the space became a priority.

To solve our theatre problem, we started working with the school's Actor's Studio program, Kurt Binnie and Michael Papoulias (Information Services at LBPSB), Dany Lasablonnière (Oreille Bionique), Tracey Green, our Itinerant Educational Specialist (IES) from the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf (MOSD), Jenny Alvarado and Stephanie Joly-Houde (MOSD audiologists) and talking to end users (those using assistive listening devices).

It was quickly determined that a WiFi-based system would best meet the needs of universal accessibility (as opposed to T-coil or FM-based systems traditionally used in concert venues). The system from Listen Technologies that we agreed on allows the user to connect to the audio via their phone over WiFi and stream directly to their listening devices or a pair of headphones. This means that anyone in the theatre who wishes to use assistive listening can access what is being said on the stage with increased ease, enjoy the sound

effects, listen to music being performed, as well as participate in a presentation. The introduction of this technology has led us to push for the consistent use of microphones during assemblies and meetings (instead of teachers projecting their voices), leading to a much more optimal access. In addition, we have also started to caption our live events using a custom built Google Chrome Extension, which leverages the use of inbuilt captioning in Google Slides.

Putting technology in place to break down barriers is an important step to improving access to information, but it does not solve everything for those living with varying degrees of deafness. Listening requires a great deal of effort, especially for the members of our school community with hearing loss. They are supported with services provided by a comprehensive team from the MOSD including the IES and audiologists. As the students make their way through their school careers, they work with their IES on auditory training and self-determination/advocacy skills to be able to access the classroom curriculum and school life.

Auditory training is a must when using listening technology as the brain is a muscle and requires constant exercise to keep itself sharp. During a recent staging of *Alice in Wonderland*, headsets were used to enhance communication between the crew, including the sound designer who had hearing loss. Situation-focused auditory training in this new environment allowed the student with hearing loss to feel more competent and contribute in a meaningful way. It reminds us all that we can do anything we put our minds to! ■



The booth in the Louise Chalmers Theatre at John Rennie High School.
Photo courtesy of C. Webb

Find out more about what we've been up to on our blog at <http://www.listeningaccessability.ca>.

Chris Webb is a math teacher at John Rennie High School. Tracey Green is a teacher of the deaf/ Montreal Oral School for the Deaf Itinerant Educational Specialist.



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Carlyle Elementary implements solution-focused approach

by *Jordan Stoopler*

“Feel something, say something! (respectfully)”

Take a stroll down the bustling hallways of Carlyle Elementary School of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) and you are bound to cross paths with at least one staff member wearing a white t-shirt with this school motto prominently displayed. The slogan itself was the brainchild of childcare worker Joyanne Marie Layne, during a recent solutions-focused teacher’s workshop with trainer-consultant Sharon Casey.

“A lot of times, people are upset as they walk around the school,” said Layne. “Their faces are upset but they aren’t saying anything. It is important to speak up for conflict resolution and a happier team dynamic.”

“After COVID, we were detached,” said school principal Dina Vourdousis. “We needed a catalyst to bring us together. The solutions-focused approach was that catalyst to take our minds off the problem and focus on the solution.”

Vourdousis says the initial workshop empowered her staff of 65 to solve problems cohesively, as opposed to coming to her for conflict resolution. The approach, she says, has given her staff “their voices back.”

Carlyle has also integrated their solutions-focused approach into their International Baccalaureate Primary Years Programme (IB-PYP). An IB school since 2013, Carlyle breaks down its curriculum into multiple units of inquiry aimed at building conceptual understanding all the while nurturing and developing caring students with a fondness for learning. The program culminates with an annual exhibition put on by the Grade 6 graduating class showcasing personal inquiry projects centered around a common theme.

“We follow ministry requirements, but the approach we take is different,” said Christina Mallozzi, teacher in the Pre-Kindergarten/Kindergarten split class. “We’re getting the students involved so that they are passionate about what they are learning and inquiring about. We have a lot of diverse learners as well. We are able to

tailor the units to the individual needs and abilities of the students.”

In Georgia Papadopoulos’ Grade 1 class, the students have embraced another saying: “Don’t squeal unless it’s a big deal.” Papadopoulos says the mantra aims to have students differentiate between big and small problems.

“Critical thinking and problem solving is embedded in our IB program,” said Papadopoulos, a teacher for 36 years, the last 24 of which she has spent at Carlyle. “We’re a very student-centered school, with the teacher merely acting as a facilitator. Every day, the students are faced with opportunities to develop their problem-solving skills at their level, which, in turn, will help them develop solutions either independently or in a group.”

“Students will come and share what has happened to them, but preface it by saying



Students in Georgia Papadopoulos’ Grade 1 class reenact the fable *The Little Red Hen* as they learn the value of teamwork.

there’s no need to worry, that they have talked about it and moved past it,” said Ioanna Diacoumacos, one of the IB coordinators at the school. “They’re able to problem-solve on their own and use the skills they have learned in school to overcome small problems they may have.”

“To support preventative measures in our school, we were pleased to have received funding from Santé Publique to offer training on Solution-Focused Schools,” said Gail Callender, assistant director, Student Services with the EMSB. This school year, the following elementary schools engaged in a two-day training session: Carlyle, Cedarcrest, St. Monica, St. Gabriel, Merton and Willingdon, as well as FOCUS high school. ■

AMI-Quebec provides mental health resource list online

by *Hena Kon*

When it comes to mental health, AMI-Quebec Action on Mental Illness is determined to leave no stone unturned. Now in its 46th year, this pioneering organization provides a wealth of support, education, advocacy and resources free of charge to help families manage the effects of mental illness.

For centuries, mental illness was shrouded in stigma and secrecy. Access to information and guidance was virtually non-existent, and families were often viewed by the medical profession as the cause of mental illness, Sylvia Klein states on the organization’s website. She, along with her husband Bill Klein, was one of AMI-Quebec’s founding members. The seeds for AMI-Quebec

were planted when the late May Gruman, having learned about a self-help group in Australia for families of children with mental illness, contacted Klein to ask if she would consider starting something similar in Montreal. Gruman and her husband Sam, met with the Kleins, Eve and Ed Leckner, and Ruth and Ken Moscovitch, forming the nucleus of AMI-Quebec’s first self-help group.

Over the years, with the support of sympathetic mental health professionals, they gradually expanded their services. Since its founding in 1977, AMI-Quebec has grown to include 10 staff and 130 volunteers, offering a wide menu of programs and activities related to mental health.

A partner of the English Montreal School Board for many years, AMI-Quebec is praised by Despina Vassiliou, a psychologist and the board’s coordinator of Student Services, as thorough, comprehensive and very helpful for parents. Its resource list is divided into seven broad categories: illnesses, additional challenges, care-giving related issues, crisis and counselling, general information, returning to the community and special populations. Taking into account Montreal’s multicultural population, the latter category contains a section entitled “specific communities,” listing organizations that support different cultural and ethnic communities with services offered in their mother tongue, as well as agencies that cater to immigrants and refugees.

Counselling can be essential to coping with and recovering from mental health challenges. While AMI-Quebec offers a variety of support groups, it does not offer individual or group counselling. The Resource List’s section entitled Counselling and Therapy is notable for including organizations that offer therapy, including art therapy, free of charge or on a sliding scale. ■

To learn more about AMI-Quebec, visit www.amiquebec.org or call 514.486.1448.

Hena Kon is a writer, editor and communications specialist with extensive experience primarily in healthcare communications.

Westmount High students receive ‘wellness boxes’ ahead of exam period

by *Jordan Stoopler*



Students choose items to make up the wellness boxes during a shopping expedition in February 2023.

It's rather unique to see Secondary III and IV high school students dismissed early from class on a Wednesday afternoon in order to go shopping at the mall.

In this case, though, it was with a distinct purpose in mind.

In February, Westmount High School of the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) students Eliane Goldstein, Brianna Luczenczyn Bohbot, Destiny Thompson and Ella Wilson were accompanied by Spiritual and Community Animator Samantha Page Smith and youth counsellor Emma Schultz to the nearby Alexis Nihon Plaza to buy supplies for “wellness boxes,” which would be assembled and made available to all teachers and students at their school.

The initiative came following the students’ participation in the Headstrong Summit last fall, a virtual program offered by the

Mental Health Commission of Canada aimed to spread awareness and reduce stigma and stereotypes associated with mental health. The idea for the boxes came about from the group’s bimonthly lunch meetings of their Health & Wellbeing Student Committee. It also follows their initial project of placing posters destigmatizing mental health struggles around the school.

“We began by brainstorming ideas all together,” said Wilson. “Over time, the themes of the boxes started to take shape.”

These themes include Cozy Reading, Artsy, Brain Exercises, Building and Breathing. The eight individual boxes will include such items as LEGOs, Play-Doh, kinetic sand, colouring kits and word puzzle books – all purchased from Dollarama, Omer de Serres as well as other online retailers. Students took note of the successes and failures of their pilot box, which was initially distributed to a handful of classes.

“Teachers can check out the boxes via an online sign-out sheet and use them as part of classroom wellness breaks,” said Smith. “We also might have them out on a table in the lobby during lunch and recess for students to use.”

Students were allotted a \$1,000 budget for their boxes, courtesy of a grant obtained by the EMSB’s Student Services Department. On their shopping expedition, they carried around a clipboard with a detailed breakdown of the contents of each individual box and jotted down prices.

Smith says this project has taught students not just about the importance of positive mental health, but other life skills, such as budgeting and how to calculate tax when making purchases.

The boxes were made available to teachers and students at the end of March ahead of the exam period. ■

Stress and anxiety: Accessing the benefits!

by *Janet Silverstone Perlis and Despina Vassiliou*

We often assume that anything stressful or anxiety-provoking is always negative and should be avoided at all costs. Scientists, however, point out that stress and anxiety are not always harmful and actually provide benefits.

This type of “good stress,” referred to as eustress, and the negative, more harmful version called distress both produce similar physiological symptoms. The difference lies in our perceptions of them. Eustress motivates us, operating at times like when working to meet a deadline. Distress is typically associated with fear, producing feelings of overwhelm and defeat. Eustress is believed to be a normal state that contributes to our overall health. Research has found a link between a short-term exposure to eustress and improved immune system functioning, among other health benefits.

To help normalize anxiety and stress, changing our perception of that stress from something distressing to something more manageable can be empowering.

Some ways we can reframe stress include:

- Interpret the physiological symptoms of stress as a warning sign. They prepare us for something that is happening, whether the source is negative or positive. Much like a smoke detector that goes off at the first sign of smoke, our initial feelings of discomfort related to stress are a way for our body to energize us for the next step.
- Use stress as a motivator. The alertness generated by the stress response can mobilize us into action, enhance our performance whether it is completing a task or test, or competing. Eustress has been shown to enhance working memory, focus and energy.
- Experiencing stress as inoculation helps us handle similar situations in the future. Much like a vaccine can boost our immune system, exposure to stress and successfully managing it can build our resiliency. Smaller doses of stress give us a chance to develop coping tools and the confidence to navigate the tough situa-

tions. These previous experiences help build our resilience.

Stress is ultimately unavoidable; there is no such thing as a stress-free life. However, we can strengthen our coping skills by engaging in some of the following:

1. Exercise is a natural way for your body to recover from the stress-related chemical changes, such as increased adrenalin and cortisol.
2. Instead of criticizing ourselves, take a moment at the end of the day to think about our accomplishments. Focus on what worked and reinforce helpful strategies rather than dissecting what did not go well or did not get done.
3. Distinguish between situations you are able to control versus the ones you cannot. It is most rewarding to focus your energy on situations that are changeable and find ways to get through situations out of your control.

4. Break down tasks into smaller, more achievable goals.

5. Never compare your response to a stress to anyone else's. We may all be in the same storm but on different ships.

6. Recognize when it is time to seek out extra support. Sometimes talking to a good friend is enough, however if the worries persist and you have difficulty functioning, don't hesitate to speak to a therapist with the goal of learning to handle stressful situations.

Remember: Distress can be reframed into eustress. It is a matter of perception and mindset – we must focus on it. ■

Janet Silverstone Perlis, M.Ed., is a psychologist, and Despina Vassiliou, Ph.D., is a psychologist and coordinator, Student Services. Both are at the English Montreal School Board.

Trauma-informed workshops support EMSB staff, parents

by *Jordan Stoopler*

A pilot project has started at the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) to inform teachers and staff about trauma through a series of workshops. It's part of an effort to inform and empower the EMSB community in managing adverse experiences and sensitizing school communities to trauma care.

Trauma is something that touches a vast number of individuals. According to the US-based Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as high as 61 percent of adults report having experienced potentially traumatic events, also known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), as children and adolescents (ages 0 to 17).

ACEs have been linked to chronic physical health problems, mental illness and substance abuse among other consequences. "This has become an important area of focus in the EMSB community, particularly from a prevention point of view as well as a way to support and empower our community," said Despina Vassiliou, psychologist and coordinator, Student Services with the EMSB.

John F. Kennedy High School was one school which has benefitted from the workshops. These were led by trauma informed care and wellness consultant Rosetta Sowkey for staff members both individually and in group settings at the beginning of the 2022/2023 school year.

"We wanted to open it up to the entire staff and give them that training so they know how to spot the signs and triggers of trauma amongst our students," said the school's interim principal Vito Guerriero. "We never talk specifically about what we

can do to help those who have been witness to trauma. These workshops are the ones that spoke best to our community. It changed a lot of people's lives here."

Other trauma-informed workshops have also since been held at EMSB outreach schools such as Vezina High School and Mile End following the success of the pilot program at John F. Kennedy High School.

Recently, Sowkey presented a parent workshop entitled, "Understanding my child's responses to lived experiences and how to support their learning." She offered tips such as how to practice mindfulness with children, recognize symptoms of trauma and behaviour responses following trauma, and different ways to practice mental and physical health. ■

More on Sowkey's consulting for trauma care

Rosetta Sowkey, a trauma informed care and wellness consultant, outlines the benefits of seeking help after exposure to a traumatic event on her website rosettasowkey.com. She says trauma integration counselling can provide individuals with confidence "to cope with daily stressors," offer strategies in grounding and mindfulness, "reduce fear and anxiety by confronting the trauma memories" and allow for increased trust to be built with oneself and others, among other noted benefits. On her website, Sowkey suggested someone exhibiting signs of anxiety and fear "which are impacting your life," difficulty concentrating, irregular sleep patterns, anger and irritability, guilt, shame or isolation should determine if this type of counselling is appropriate for their situation.

- J.S.

Screen and social media habits: Finding a healthy balance

by *Victoria Della Cioppa*

Screen usage and social media are necessary in present society. The question is not about eliminating these vices from our lives, but rather finding a healthy balance between online life and the negative habits that could form. According to one teenage testimonial from the Children's Screen Time Action Network, "There's a difference between going to screens to diffuse and relax and going to screens to escape confronting reality and your problems."

A key moment where caregivers can intervene is bedtime. Establishing nighttime routines early and getting children in the habit of developing a sleep schedule is a fundamental skill that will serve them beyond childhood. The Canadian Pediatrics Society recommends that screens be put away a minimum of one hour before bedtime because the bright light and constant

stimulation from the screens can alter the body's natural sleep rhythm. Instead, use this time to establish a bedtime routine. Review your child's agenda, pick snacks, put on pajamas, brush teeth and read a bedtime story. As children get older, this routine will not only become automatic, but will cue their brain for sleep. The goal is that by setting this routine early, teenagers will be less attached to their device during bedtime and more willing to charge their devices in a common room.

When teenagers receive social media notifications, dopamine is released in the brain. This trigger is the body's natural reward system, but is also highly distracting from tasks, including homework. Caregivers have a responsibility to set boundaries around screentime use and teach children when it is acceptable to be on their devices and when they need to focus on

the non-digital world. Setting media-free locations, such as the bedroom, and media-free times, especially when doing homework, gives children the permission to concentrate on something other than their devices. If, however, your children need to be on their devices for schoolwork, consider following the 20-20-20 rule: every 20 minutes, for 20 seconds, stand up and look at something 20 feet away. This trick refocuses both the eyes and the brain from the overstimulating effects of screens.

As one teenager wisely pointed out, there is a difference between intentional and passive screentime. We must teach youth to be mindful of such moments and shift their default habit to another activity, "Make sure that every time you are engaged with your phone that you actually want to be. Sometimes I'll be scrolling for no reason, I don't really want to be on my phone but it's

just what I've learned to do when nothing is happening. Recognize those moments, put down your phone and go do something enjoyable," according to Children's Screen Time Action Network.

Adults can assist youth by providing alternatives to screentime during nonscheduled time as well as externalize reasons for their own media consumption by articulating to their children their goals for being online unexpectedly.

The most powerful act caregivers can do is recognize teachable moments and provide strategies to set children on the path toward having a healthy relationship with screens. ■

Victoria Della Cioppa is project development officer – School Climate for the English Montreal School Board.

Sleep addressed in health promotion program

by *Tania Piperni*

Sleep is a habit that contributes to a healthy lifestyle and can impact many facets of life, according to Dr. Reut Gruber, psychologist, full professor in the Department of Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine at McGill University, and director of the Attention Behaviour and Sleep Lab at the Douglas Mental Health University Institute in Montreal.

In an interview with *Inspirations*, Dr. Gruber explained that healthy sleep contributes to the prevention of health problems and to the promotion of wellness in everyone's life, including children and adolescents. When healthy sleep is integrated into everyday life and becomes a habit, it improves one's quality of life, and for school-age children this means better school functioning, according to empirical data. Healthy sleep facilitates focus, so students who are well rested are able to learn better.

One of the roles sleep plays across development is supporting the acquisition of new

skills or new knowledge. Newly acquired information is consolidated at night and integrated into our long-term memory while we sleep.

Healthy sleep is also related to the moods and emotions of both children and adolescents. It makes the difference between being able to adjust emotionally and being moody, reactive and irritable. Physical health is also impacted by sleep, with poor sleep health being associated with obesity and poor weight regulation.

What is healthy sleep? What factors can contribute to sleep health? Dr. Gruber explains that healthy sleep is multi-faceted, meaning that it is not only about the amount of sleep, which is the aspect that is so often discussed, but also factors such as the quality, timing and consistency of sleep. In school, students are often taught about healthy eating, while also highlighting the benefits of being physically active. Unfortunately, the teaching of healthy sleep is often overlooked.

One way this is being addressed is through Dr. Gruber's sleep health promotion program, which started in partnership with Riverside School Board and in collaboration with a variety of school board professionals, including Gail Sommerville, Sujata Saha Johanne Boursier, Chantale Scroggins, Sylvain Racette and a large number of teachers and educators. Together they created specific teaching content, a teacher's guide and even rubrics for evaluation.

Starting at the elementary level, some of the teachers in the program have integrated sleep health promotion into their regular classroom curriculum. The content was adapted to the three cycle levels in elementary schools so that it is appropriate for all ages of students. Some teachers at the high school level have also started teaching practical strategies and concrete elements of healthy sleep based on the materials created by Dr. Gruber's team.

This project has been ongoing for over 10 years, including through the COVID-19

pandemic. Data collection highlights students making sustained and manageable habit changes that improve their sleep health. Her team is currently looking to improve the program further.

The program included students with special needs who were in the inclusive classrooms, however data was not collected specifically based on their needs. This is a future research goal for Dr. Gruber and her partners because sleep can affect the functioning of students with special needs in school which can, in turn, lead to identifying further school accommodations that may help them improve this lifestyle element. She believes it is an avenue that needs to be further explored and researched in order to better accommodate students learning in schools. ■

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

Special to Inspirations

by *Dr. Reut Gruber*

Sleep is essential for the health and well-being of children and adolescents, helping them to feel rested and focused throughout the day. While they sleep soundly through the night, their body and brain are hard at work.

The brain's neurons are repaired and restored during sleep, as they process the previous day and prepare for the next day's activities.

The brain is one of the most active organs in the body. When brain cells consume high amounts of energy, they spit out a lot of debris that floats around the brain. Sleep is the time for cleaning up this mess. Every night during the deepest sleep stage known as slow wave sleep, the brain clears the "neurological debris" created during the day's activities.

Sleep is the most powerful cognitive enhancer, outperforming stimulants, such as caffeinated products – like coffee – and pharmaceutical boosters. Optimized sleep is associated with superior vigilance, attention, learning ability and memory. Learning refers to the ability to record new information and skills. Sleep prior to learning is required in order to "charge" the neural circuits that support encoding of new information. Sleep deprivation results in a loss of 40 percent of newly acquired information. Losing so much information at the learning stage greatly reduces our ability to benefit from, or remember, new information. This results in poor academic performance.

When it comes to academic performance, balancing the amount of time spent studying and sleeping is an important key to success. This is because the cost of reduced sleep outweighs the potential benefits of the

added studying time. Cognitive processes that are the most crucial for academic success, such as attention, learning and memory, are also the most sensitive to inadequate sleep.

For example, an experiment conducted at Baylor University offered students extra credit if they averaged eight or more hours of sleep for students in a psychology class during their final exams week, and for students in a graphics studio class over five days leading up to the completion of their final assignment. The psychology students who averaged eight or more hours of sleep, as measured by watches that record sleep time, performed significantly better on their final exams than students who chose not to participate or who slept less than eight hours.

For the graphics studio final assignments, participants who took the eight-hour challenge slept an average of 98 minutes more



each night than non-incentivized students, and 82 minutes more than they self-reported sleeping during the semester. While they performed as well as students who devoted longer hours to studying and slept less, those students who experienced more consistent sleep, i.e., fewer nights of poor sleep followed by rebound sleep, performed better than students who showed inconsistent sleep.

► *Continued on p. 18*

La crise du logement se fait davantage sentir chez les personnes autistes

par *Nicolas Monet*

Il y a « un manque criant » de logements au Québec pour les personnes autistes, conclut une étude menée par la Maison de l'autisme et l'Université de Montréal, publiée en février dernier. Il s'agit de la première recherche systématique sur les besoins et les attentes des personnes autistes en matière d'hébergement réalisée dans la province.

Près de 60 % des personnes autistes ne vivent pas dans la situation de logement qu'elles souhaitent à court ou à long terme, estiment les coautrices, Isabelle Courcy et Nuria Jeanneret.

« Le peu d'options ne tient pas compte de la pluralité des besoins », résume-t-on dans l'étude. Un peu plus de la moitié des 370 personnes autistes sondées trouvent que

leur situation d'habitation ne répond pas à leurs besoins et préférences.

Par ailleurs, 90 % des répondants rapportent avoir rencontré des difficultés d'accès à un logement ou un hébergement dans les deux dernières années. Manque de logements adaptés, contraintes économiques, difficultés dans la recherche, anxiété à l'idée de vivre seul : les obstacles sont nombreux et importants. « Plein de petits événements de la vie quotidienne peuvent être pénalisants pour les personnes qui sont moins à l'aise », explique en entrevue Isabelle Courcy, professeure de sociologie à l'Université de Montréal.

En outre, moins de 30 % des personnes sondées sont propriétaires ou contribuent au loyer de leur hébergement, et 62 %

demeurent avec leur famille, constate-t-on dans l'étude. Une grande vulnérabilité économique qui peut être source d'inquiétude pour les personnes autistes et leurs parents, ces derniers redoutant leur vieillissement ou leur épuisement, précisent les autrices.

Rester chez des proches peut aussi être problématique pour les personnes autistes désirant plus d'indépendance. « Ma famille ne comprend pas mon intimité ou parfois des besoins liés à l'autisme », souligne un jeune autiste cité dans l'étude.

La solution? Développer des « modèles résidentiels diversifiés », qui intègrent différentes formes de soutien, suggèrent les chercheuses.

« C'est un spectre, l'autisme. On va avoir besoin d'un spectre de solutions », soutient

Xavier Henri Hervé, président et cofondateur de la Maison de l'autisme.

Il faudra faire en sorte que les personnes autistes aient un chez-soi adapté dans la communauté, et non en retrait du monde, poursuit-il. D'ailleurs, notons qu'une majorité des répondants ont manifesté une ouverture à habiter dans un environnement où cohabitent des personnes autistes et non autistes, et où il y a de la mixité sociale. ■

Nicolas Monet écrit pour Inspirations depuis le printemps 2023. Il est également journaliste au Journal Métro, et a précédemment travaillé comme avocat en droit du travail. Doté d'une curiosité insatiable, Nicolas s'intéresse autant aux questions sociopolitiques qu'à la culture et aux sports.



Des participants du Regroupement pour la Trisomie 21 ont rendu visite à Chef on Call le 21 février.
Photo : Kelvin Franco

Sortie Chef on Call

Encore une fois cette année, le Regroupement pour la Trisomie 21 a eu la chance de collaborer avec le restaurant Chef on Call. Le 21 février dernier, un groupe de 10 personnes vivant avec la trisomie 21 ont pris part à la création du nouveau Donator Burger!

Ce hamburger figurera au menu du resto tout au long du mois de mars. Pour chaque burger vendu, 2 \$ sont remis à un organisme. Ce mois-ci, la succursale de Montréal versera ses profits au Regroupement pour la Trisomie 21.

Pour lancer cette promotion, les participants du mardi au programme TASA (Technologie au service de l'autonomie) ont été invités à créer la sauce et la panure utilisées pour assembler le hamburger. Galette de poulet croustillante, mesclun, jalapenos frits, kimchi, fromage Monterey Jack et une mayonnaise sriracha! Ils ont eu beaucoup de plaisir et ont pu rencontrer le chef ainsi que toute l'équipe en cuisine. Quelle belle initiative!

- Claudie Drolet et Élisabeth Langlois

Sleep for success ◀ Cont'd from p. 17

There are several things you can do to teach your child how to fall asleep and stay asleep:

Create a consistent sleep routine. This is a series of short activities your child does in the same sequence each night as they prepare to go to bed. The sequence could include putting on PJs, brushing teeth and doing calming activities such as a bath, a song or a story. Repeating the same sleep routine each night creates an association between these activities and sleep. This helps the child transition to sleep.

Keep bedtimes, wake-up times and nap times consistent throughout the week, and try to avoid more than a one-hour difference between week and weekend schedules.

If your child is very young (a baby), place the child in bed when he or she is drowsy but still awake and leave the room. This will help your child develop the ability to self-soothe.

Get a healthy amount of light exposure throughout the day, with 30 minutes of sunlight before 1 pm. **Avoid using electronics before bedtime** to reduce blue light exposure and if using these devices, turn on blue light filters.

Be active during the day. Get some exercise during the day but avoid work-outs or overstimulating activities before bedtime.

Keep calm at night. Use calming activities at bedtime such as meditation or relaxation.

Keep bed for sleep only. It's better to do homework, watch movies or enjoy bonding time in a different place.

Create a healthy bedroom environment. Make sure the bedroom is cool, dark and quiet.

Avoid caffeinated food and drink at least three to four hours before bedtime. ■

Reut Gruber is a scientist, licensed psychologist and sleep expert. She is a full professor in the department of psychiatry at McGill University; director of the Attention, Behaviour and Sleep lab at the Douglas Mental Health University Institute; and diplomate of the American Academy of Cognitive Therapy.

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Camp B'nai Brith's Avodah program combines leisure, work

by *Anita Szabadi-Gottesman*

Forging lifelong friendships and experiencing a true sense of belonging through the magic of summer camp often shapes the lives of youth. Since 2018, Camp B'nai Brith has been growing its unique Avodah program geared for neurodiverse young adults.

"There is now a place at summer camp for these adults," said program director, Matthew Selvin, who is a special needs consultant and behaviourist. With a short break due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions, summer 2022 saw 14 participants, divided equally between women and men, having a two-week overnight camp experience.

Founded in 1921 and located at a lake in Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts on wooded grounds, Camp B'nai Brith has offered a

camping experience serving the Jewish community for over 100 years. The Avodah program has become an integral part of the camp. ("Avodah" means "work" in Hebrew.)

Selvin hires his team members carefully, ensuring they have backgrounds in speech and occupational therapy, paramedic training, fitness instruction and more. "I am choosing counsellors with a variety of skills in order to stay on top of all the participants' medical, physical and emotional needs," he explained.

Participants, who must meet certain basic criteria and be semi-autonomous, use the program to develop employment skills. "We want to impact these special needs adults – prepare them for their year ahead after they leave camp," Selvin said. To that end, combined with traditional camp experiences such as field trips and nights out of camp for leisure activities, each participant is employed by the camp. Holding an office



The 2022 summer camp group poses at the waterfront after a motor-boat outing. Photo courtesy of Camp B'Nai Brith

function or working in the dining hall are some examples of jobs they are paid for.

"Not only do participants forge a true sense of belonging through their work, they [also] truly benefit the overall functioning of the camp," pointed out Selvin. "The camp provides us with amazing resources, combining work responsibilities with leisure activities – allowing participants not only to feel accomplished but allocating time for building social connections."

Selvin said that together with executive director Josh Pepin and his incredible team, they are continually looking to enhance participants' camping experience. For Pepin, the program not only enriches the lives of its participants but sensitizes both campers and staff to the daily realities of

special needs adults. "We are witness to a beautiful synergy that develops between the Avodah group and the entire camp," he said. "We are able to provide much needed respite for the parents of these special needs adults, ensuring a safe and stimulating environment, building their self-confidence and watching them learn about new pieces of themselves."

"As a life-long camper myself, with memories I hold so dear, I am so happy to be able to direct this very special program," said Selvin. "I speak not only for myself but for my staff members as well that we all grow as a result of working with this population of young adults." ■

For information, visit www.cbbmtl.org.

As the MNA for D'Arcy-McGee and as the mother of a special needs child, I have so much admiration for the schools and staff that work tirelessly to help these young people achieve their potential. As a society and as a community we need to work together to make sure that all of our children have the opportunity to go to school and just be kids.

En tant que députée de D'Arcy-McGee et en tant que mère d'un enfant ayant des besoins spéciaux, j'ai beaucoup d'admiration pour les écoles et le personnel qui travaillent sans relâche pour aider ces jeunes à atteindre leur plein potentiel. En tant que société et en tant que communauté, nous devons travailler ensemble pour nous assurer que tous nos enfants ont la possibilité d'aller à l'école et d'être eux-mêmes.

ELISABETH PRASS
MNA FOR / DÉPUTÉE DE D'ARCY-MCGEE

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Photo by Alex Gorin on Unsplash



Services éducatifs / Educational services

Intervention précoce / 0 à 3 ans

Cet âge est essentiel pour engager et développer les voies neuronales du cerveau qui sont si importantes pour le langage parlé. Les familles reçoivent un accompagnement hebdomadaire — à domicile ou à la garderie — afin de soutenir le développement de l'écoute et du langage parlé auprès de leur enfant. Grâce à l'utilisation de technologies auditives, tels que les appareils auditifs ou les implants cochléaires, et avec une stimulation auditive intense, les capacités de votre enfant s'épanouiront.

Early Intervention / Ages 0 – 3

This age is key to engage and develop the brain's neural pathways that are so important to spoken language. Families are coached weekly — in their home or at daycare — on how to help their child listen and speak. With the use of hearing technology, such as hearing aids or cochlear implants, and intensive auditory stimulation your child's capacity will bloom.

Préscolaire / 3 à 5 ans

Votre enfant jouera et apprendra avec des camarades entendants dans un cadre préscolaire naturel et dynamique. Nous proposons des séances individuelles quotidiennes qui se concentrent sur le développement de l'écoute et du langage parlé. Nous assurons également un suivi étroit de la technologie auditive de votre enfant. Les frères et sœurs sont les bienvenus.

Preschool / Ages 3- 5

Your child will play and learn with hearing peers in a natural and vibrant preschool setting. We provide daily one-on-one sessions that focus on developing listening and spoken language skills. We also provide close monitoring of your child's hearing technology. Siblings welcome.

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Elementary school / Grades 1 – 6

Our small classes follow the Quebec curriculum, and include French, music and gym, with an extra emphasis on literacy. Each student has an individualized education plan (IEP) to address their specific needs. We continue to develop your child's listening and spoken language skills while optimizing their hearing technology. Our goal is to close the language gap in preparation for your child to join the mainstream.

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Giant Steps set to open new autism centre this fall

by *Jordan Stoopler*

The excitement is palpable ahead of the scheduled opening this fall of Giant Steps' brand-new 65,000-plus square-foot centre in the city's east end.

"It is probably the most important time in the history of Giant Steps," said Andre Pereira, Giant Steps' director of marketing and communications. "It's going to change everything. We've been more than just a school for many years, but now we'll be able to expand programs and services in all areas, in a state-of-the-art centre."

The project centers on four distinct yet interrelated pillars: youth education, adult education and employment, community outreach and training, and a research and innovation hub. The space will be able to accommodate more students, with 120 youth-sector students between the ages of four and 21 set to enroll (an increase of 30 from the current student body), and approximately 70 students aged 21 and

over. Additional services will be offered to the community at large, including activities on weekends.

"With the vision that led to the construction of this new building, Giant Steps will support autistic individuals across their life span and build upon our strengths and strong partnerships to positively impact the world of autism for generations to come," said Pereira.

The design of the \$52-million centre, constructed by Provencher Roy under the leadership of Giant Steps' director of Innovation and Special Projects Thomas Henderson, is unique. The round curvature of the building was chosen so as to allow natural light to enter. Certain classes have special pods for students to escape the hustle and bustle of the classroom itself – a mini class within the larger class, so to speak.

There is also a spacious gym/multi-purpose room, which will feature windows that open directly onto the yard. The current



Giant Steps new centre is set to open next school year in Montreal's Technopôle Angus neighbourhood. Photo courtesy of Giant Steps School

school, located in NDG, does not have a gymnasium for students.

"Everything from the way the light enters the building to the breakout classes and nooks and crannies within the class and common spaces were designed with autistic individuals' needs in mind," said Pereira.

The centre's new location within Montreal's Technopôle Angus neighbourhood in Rosemont-La Petite Patrie was also carefully chosen.

"It is a very dynamic, inclusive and community-focused neighbourhood," said Pereira. "Everyone really supports each other. We have a few initiatives that we will carry out in the community rather quickly

to further promote inclusion and provide opportunities for our students, as well as the autistic community at large."

The project first broke ground in December of 2021 and has been funded mainly by private donors and fundraising efforts, save \$15 million provided by the provincial government. Despite the capital campaign beginning at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, Pereira says support has been strong with the community stepping up to support the venture. Efforts are currently focused on raising the outstanding \$4 million needed to reach its \$51.4 million goal.

The centre is scheduled to open in time for the 2023-2024 academic year. ■



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Paparelli a big name in this year's Autism Speaks Canada Walk

by *Anita Szabadi-Gottesman*

Watching her then 10-year-old son Giuseppe Paparelli excitedly jump on his bicycle two summers ago was yet another major milestone that mom Angela D'Amico and her husband Tommaso Paparelli were thrilled to witness. "Giuseppe, now 12, just loves riding his bike – something we never thought that he would be able to do," said D'Amico. "But he did it and continues to do so much more each and every day, every week and every year!"

Giuseppe was diagnosed with autism at the age of three and a half when it became more and more apparent to his parents that he was not meeting many major developmental milestones. Listening to D'Amico beam about all her son has achieved so far, it is clear to see why Giuseppe was chosen not only as the Montreal Ambassador for this year's Autism Speaks Canada annual fundraising walk but simultaneously as its National Walk Ambassador. "We have been

a part of the walk since 2019, rallying family, friends and colleagues not only to raise much needed funds for continued research but getting the word out about autism to as large an audience as possible," she said.

Every day is a new day with a new challenge for the family, including Giuseppe's younger brother Alessandro, who is nine. "We learn alongside Giuseppe and from his incredible team of occupational and physical therapists among other professionals and his teachers at Summit School," said D'Amico. "We are truly blessed together with Giuseppe's grandparents and extended family to feel that we are all working together. I am not a superhero. I rely on help from others."

D'Amico and her family are participating in the Autism Speaks Canada Walk because she says they want to make sure every autistic child receives all the help he needs. "There are many very difficult days

that I am frustrated, that I feel I can't do this anymore," she shared. "Parents have to know that there are resources and so much to learn to better understand their autistic child. I never give up and neither should any parent of an autistic child."

Patience takes on a whole new meaning as many autistic children can present many challenges from physical, to intellectual and behavioural. "With Giuseppe as both Montreal and national ambassador, my goal is to truly get the word out to educate more and more people about autism. If they know more, they will understand more," said D'Amico. The Paparelli family wants to show that above all else, there is always hope. "We are living what so many other families are living, and we are proving every day you must never give up!" she said. ■



Giuseppe Paparelli, bottom right, with his family.
Photo courtesy of A. D'Amico

*This year's Autism Speaks Canada Montreal walk will take place June 11.
Join the Inspirations-EMSB walk team!
For more information or to register:
www.autismspeaks.ca*

Faire sa place, un stage à la fois à Peter Hall

par *Nicolas Monet*

Raphaël Castonguay-Goulet, sourire en coin, parcourt à toute allure les allées du Métro Plus Côte-Vertu, remplaçant divers items sur les étagères. Il connaît l'épicerie comme le fond de sa poche. Depuis plus d'un an, l'élève de l'école Peter Hall – qui accueille des jeunes à besoins particuliers – y effectue un stage dans le cadre du programme Portail.

« Après la première journée, je n'étais pas sûr », confie le jeune homme de 18 ans. Manifestement à l'aise désormais, il n'a plus aucune gêne à répondre aux clients qui demandent son aide pour trouver certains aliments.

Le programme Portail vise à développer les habiletés professionnelles et interpersonnelles d'élèves âgés de 15 à 21 ans pour favoriser leur intégration sociale à la fin de leur parcours scolaire. En plus de leur cours en classe, les participants effectuent des stages variés à l'école et à l'externe – chez Subway, Tigre Géant ou au Cimetière Mont-Royal, par exemple.

« Le but, c'est qu'ils prennent confiance en eux », affirme Christel Pommiers, technicienne en éducation spécialisée à Peter Hall. De nombreux jeunes atteints de déficience intellectuelle ou de troubles du spectre de l'autisme vivent beaucoup d'anxiété à leur arrivée dans la vie adulte, souligne-t-elle.

À l'école, les élèves se répartissent les tâches de cuisine, de jardinage, de recyclage, de nettoyage. Ils gèrent également une cantine, où les membres du personnel de Peter Hall peuvent acheter cafés, repas et friandises. Tout le monde met la main à la pâte, et les

plus responsables se voient confier des rôles de supervision. « C'est comme un petit village », illustre M^{me} Pommiers.

Ainsi, les jeunes apprennent dans un environnement sécuritaire à adopter une conduite professionnelle, à maintenir une bonne apparence et à devenir ponctuels, explique l'éducatrice spécialisée. « La rigidité disparaît petit à petit, poursuit-elle. Ils nous surprennent parce qu'ils s'adaptent vite. »

À sa sortie de Peter Hall, Raphaël Castonguay-Goulet souhaite travailler au dépanneur près de chez lui, où il pourrait s'occuper de prendre les commandes. « Il a une très bonne mémoire », précise Christel Pommiers, vantant son



Raphaël Castonguay-Goulet, en stage, dans les allées du Métro Plus Côte-Vertu, le 10 mars.

potentiel. « Ce que nous voulons : c'est que les élèves atteignent le meilleur d'eux-mêmes, tout en apportant leur contribution à la société comme tout un chacun, car ils en ont le droit »! ■

Summit School marks six decades of educating the neurodiverse

by *Paul Karwatsky*

Sam Lewis is 24 years old. It's his first time back at Summit School in Saint-Laurent in three years. He's returned not as a student but as an alumnus.

"I love film. That's me. That's who I am."

Sam is addressing a large crowd at the school's annual parent/caregiver panel. He's poised and confident. He has autism. He is just one of Summit's many success stories. Sam came to Summit in Grade 4, after being bullied relentlessly at a traditional school. Now, as a Summit graduate, he's been accepted into John Abbott College.

"The Summit Theatre Program gave me the opportunity to discover my inner talent, which I never thought I had," he said.

For 60 years, Summit School has been at the forefront of interdisciplinary education for neurodiverse students. The school accepts students from five to 21 years of age. Its approach has been ground-breaking, offering students a safe and supportive environment to explore their passions and reach their full potential.

"Summit School has over 250 staff members all working together for the best interests of our students," said senior principal Bena Finkelberg, who has been at the school for 35 years. "We like to frame it as an interdisciplinary team of professionals who all work under one roof to help our students reach their full potential. Our

goal is for every student to leave Summit School being as independent as they can be. This can look very different for each student. Our population is so varied; hence our goals need to be individualized and multi-faceted."

Herman Erdogmus has been Summit's director general for the last 10 years. "Our focus has always been on creating opportunities for our students to succeed, no matter their background or abilities," he said. "Over the course of the last 10 years, Summit has grown tremendously. The school's main campus has expanded three times and is now accommodating 450 students, making it one of the largest schools for the neurodiverse in Canada. Now we're ready for the next chapter."

Besides the main campus, Summit also runs a high-school-aged campus for 150 students at the English Montreal School Board's LaurenHill Academy in Saint-Laurent and a downtown "TECC" campus for 16 to 21-year-olds that focuses on job integration for the neurodiverse and internship partnerships with more than 40 Montreal companies and businesses.

In 2016, Summit launched SCERT, a unique research centre focusing on educational best practices for the neurodiverse embedded within a school. It is affiliated with McGill University's Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology.



Sam Lewis, left, at Summit School in January. Photo courtesy of Summit School |

Jake Burack is one of the renowned autism researchers helping to lead SCERT into the future. He said, "SCERT represents a unique and innovative school-based researcher-educator collaboration in which the researchers inform the educators about cutting-edge science and knowledge, while the educators inform the researchers about compelling educational issues and topics that need to be studied."

Summit's next step falls right in line with Sam's passion. The school is in the midst of a capital campaign to build The Summit Centre for Creative Arts and Physical Education. The concept: a research-friendly centre that focuses on showcasing and professionalizing the legitimate artistic talents of those with neurological conditions.

Explained Jesse Heffring, director of Development and long-time arts teacher, "Summit has a long history in the arts. It manifests in stellar educational and therapeutic intervention rooted in creativity. But it has also put together serious theatre

productions that have been presented on marquee stages like the Segal Centre."

A documentary on one of those productions, *Being Rachel*, won best documentary at the Belfast Human Rights Film Festival.

And as for Sam, this isn't the first or last time he'll be taking centre stage.

"Summit gave me a platform to express myself through my talent. It motivated me to not only pursue theatre, but I also found the will to try out different things out in the world."

That level of confidence is the key takeaway for Summit after 60 years. Students depart, ready to face the world, not uncertain about their differences, but certain that those differences shouldn't get in the way of making the world their own. ■

Paul Karwatsky is communications director at Summit School.



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including the Grade 6 IB-PYP Exhibition Project. The school psychologist, speech and occupational therapist, special education and ASD consultants are available to consult upon request.

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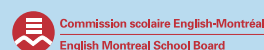
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by *Mike Cohen*

Report on Parliament

MP Poilievre visits EMSB, meets about autism initiatives

Pierre Poilievre, the new leader of the federal Conservative Party of Canada, sent a very clear signal that if he is elected prime minister of Canada, he will be there for families of special needs individuals.

In an unprecedented meeting organized by English Montreal School Board (EMSB) director general Nick Katalifos, who has a 21-year-old son on the autism spectrum, Poilievre and his wife Anaida Galindo visited the Wagar Adult Education Centre in Côte Saint-Luc in January. This is the home to many special needs adult students.

Gathered together thanks to the efforts of the Transforming Autism Care Consortium, a research network that connects and mobilizes Quebec's strengths in autism research to improve the quali-

ty of life of people with autism and their families, Poilievre, Galindo, Senator Leo Housakos and Roman Baber listened attentively as representatives from more than a dozen organizations that offer services to the autistic population provided detailed information on the challenges they face.

EMSB chair Joe Ortona, vice chair Agostino Cannavino, Commissioner Jamie Fabian and members of the management were also on hand. After the two hours of meetings, they moved to the Syd Wise Auditorium, where Poilievre addressed students and special guests.

I must say, this was an impressive gesture by Poilievre, and it was nice to see how implicated Galindo is on such an agenda item.

A new bill addressing autism
Spearheaded by Senator Housakos, Bill S-203, ("An Act respecting a federal frame-



Pierre Poilievre and his wife Anaida Galindo speak with Wagar students on January 16.

work on autism spectrum disorder) passed in March and is now law.

"I have been involved with this issue for a number of years, and there are two recurring themes when I talk to family

► *Continued on p. 37*

CBC/Radio-Canada consults Canadians about accessibility

by *Randy Pinsky*

According to the 2017 Canadian Survey on Disability released by Statistics Canada in 2022, 22 percent of Canadians over the age of 15 have some form of disability. In seeking to become a barrier-free media organization, CBC/Radio-Canada hosted public in-person and virtual "Let's Talk Accessibility!" consultations across Canada from November 28 to January 31.

The consultations were designed to elicit public discussion around three main themes: What is the feeling around how people with disabilities are portrayed in the media? What are the biggest barriers people with disabilities face when consuming content from the public broadcaster? And, how can the CBC/Radio-Canada improve its relationships with different communities?

Accessibility manager, Rachel Desjourdy, and senior administrator of the corporation's National Accessibility Plan, Jérôme

Bergeron, discussed six issues considered to inhibit full participation in society: employment, the built environment, information and communication technologies, procurement of goods and services, transportation, and design and delivery of programs and services.

"As Accessibility Lead for CBC/Radio-Canada I am really pleased with the interest and participation we have for our consultation sessions," said Desjourdy, herself hard-of-hearing. "We had the privilege of hearing from hundreds of Canadians with disabilities across the country, and look forward to using these insights to build our first national accessibility plan."

As part of its mandate of inclusion, the media organization used live closed captioning and sign language interpretation.

Closed captioning is already available for all programming, including digital platforms such as CBC GEM, with increasing

live transcription and sign language interpretation for news conferences.

One participant brought up disability representation. "We can tell our own stories. Allow us to see ourselves on mainstream TV," she said, commenting on able-bodied actors playing people with disabilities on programs such as *Glee* and *Speechless*.

"If we had more positive coverage of what people with disabilities accomplished on a daily basis, maybe we would feel more useful and understood, and it would encourage others to do more."

As an example, she mentioned Jillian Mercado, an American actress with spastic muscular dystrophy, who stars in *The L Word* and was hired not because she was in a wheelchair, but due to her acting talent.

Actress Selma Blair, who has multiple sclerosis and who competed in *Dancing with the Stars*, was also mentioned. Was it inspiring that she participated or was it

reckless to make a point? Some participants cautioned about having unrealistic expectations about ability when there is different access to resources.

Another concern was media misrepresentation especially around invisible disabilities.

"When they keep getting our stories wrong, like saying it's 'just fatigue,' it leads to so much unintentional harm," noted chronic illness advocate Sabrina Poirier, who participated in the Weymouth, Nova Scotia consultation on January 18. She appealed to journalists to "genuinely listen and let patients share their stories as they see fit, as opposed to short sound bites."

"We're not that different," said another participant. "We just have different challenges." ■

The findings from the consultations will be used to inform CBC/Radio-Canada's National Accessibility Plan, scheduled to be released by June.



by *Elisabeth Prass*

An agenda to advocate for our children

I am so proud to have been named the Official Opposition Critic for People Living with a Disability or with Autism Spectrum Disorder. As the mother of a young child on the autism spectrum, I have a first-hand understanding of the challenges our children and we, as parents, face in accessing services that our children need and deserve.

I know the joy of my son learning a new word and the pain of seeing him not be able to participate in certain activities. I know the strength that it takes for the parent of a special needs child to manage their family situation. Our children may be different, but they are not “less than.” No one will advocate for a child like their parents, and that is what we do all day, every day.

I will fight for you and your children and to hold the government accountable in terms of offering more resources and financing for programs addressed to our children. I want more respite opportunities for caregivers. I want the government to think about the transition that special needs children and their families face when that child becomes an adult.

April is World Autism Month, and on April 2 we marked the United Nations-sanctioned World Autism Awareness Day. This is an opportunity for us to celebrate the countless ways that people with autism contribute to our families, our communities and to shine a light on the systemic barriers people with autism face daily.

Our obligation is to help make sure every child, regardless of ability or background, is accepted for who they are and can lead a life free from discrimination and filled with opportunity.

In February, my colleague Marwah Rizqy and I presented a mandate of initiative for the National Assembly to examine the issue of the use of seclusion or withdrawal rooms in the education system. Unfortunately, we have seen news reports in recent months that have revealed that what should be considered as a last resort has become a convenient solution for certain educators. This request was quickly rejected by the CAQ government. We would like to see teachers who have special needs students receive training on how to understand and deal with them in a more humane manner.

Please join me in cultivating understanding, showing support and creating an inclusive community for those living with autism. ■

Elisabeth Prass is the MNA for D’Arcy-McGee and the Official Opposition Critic for Social Services, Mental Health, for People Living with a Disability or with Autism Spectrum Disorder, and for the Fight Against Homelessness. Contact: elisabeth.prass.dmg@assnat.qc.ca or 514.488.7028.



Elisabeth Prass and her son. Photo courtesy of E. Prass |



by *Joanne Charron*

The hardest but best decision of my life

My husband and I always wanted a family with four children. My first child was born with a handicap due to an accident at birth, which left him with spastic quadriplegic cerebral palsy and non-verbal. We cared for him and loved him like any other child.

In the back of our minds and in our hearts, we still wanted to have more children but were worried that it would take away our full attention to him. At the same time, how could we deny him siblings and being surrounded by family and love? We wondered: Would it be good for him to only have us

and be isolated? Would it be good for us and our family dynamic only to concentrate on him and his handicap?

We realized that this was our “normal,” so why wouldn’t we have other children? Of course, there was always the worry that our next child could have a handicap as well, but we knew that it was not a genetic issue. Despite our fears we decided it was time to have another child. I became pregnant and held my breath the whole nine months, blocking out any worry and negativity despite the reactions to my pregnancy by friends and family.

An experience that is supposed to be happy turned into one containing accusations. People said: “Why are you doing this?” or “It’s not fair to your son” or “It will take all

your time away from him” or “How can you bring another child into a world of disability?” or “It’s not fair for them to be surrounded by that” or “You’re selfish.”

We were shocked and in disbelief. I guess they believed that they were acting in our son’s best interest. But so were we, and it was the best thing we ever did.

My second child was born, and when I held him in my arms the world changed. I broke down the moment he was delivered. The doctors and nurses couldn’t understand why. Through my tears I explained I had been holding my breath for nine months, and, when he was born without incident and was well with all 10 fingers and toes, against everyone’s misgivings, I could

breathe. He made our decision right and brought balance into our lives.

We now have three children, and they are glued to one another. We have life, love and laughter in the house, and the two younger siblings won’t do anything without their brother. This is their normal and they wouldn’t have it any other way. We never did have a fourth child, but I believe a “fourth” is our advocacy for all children and adults with handicaps, and that is what we do through deeds and by example. ■

Joanne Charron is president of The C.A.R.E. Centre (www.carecentre.org) and president of the Comité des usagers du LLMRC Users’ Committee (www.llmrc.ca). She is special advisor to Inspirations. Contact her at charronjoanne@gmail.com.



by *Nick Katalifos*

Providing all children in the family the support they need to thrive

In my roles as a fellow parent, educator and advocate, I have spoken with many families about the challenge of raising our children when one has received a diagnosis that becomes the focus of the family, and how to provide balance amongst siblings.

Our journey began when my son Manoli, now 21, was one-and-a-half years old. We noticed that he wasn't meeting certain developmental milestones in comparison to other kids his age, and especially to that of his big sister, Anna.

We ultimately received a diagnosis of autism two years later. It was good to get the diagnosis so that we could begin to formulate a plan of action. My son's needs were severe, for lack of a better term, and

we began to search for support and the best pedagogical path for him. While my wife Mary, an educational consultant, and I know the educational system well, it was still a very difficult time.

When a child is first diagnosed, the entire focus of the family falls upon that particular child, and this can become an issue for siblings. We wanted to keep things as "normal" as possible so that both of our children could reach their potential. Our solution was to give each of our kids separate alone time with both of their parents.

Manoli has gone through Giant Steps School where he is thriving with the best of both worlds – specialized classrooms where he receives extra help and integration into neurotypical classrooms two days a week.

Anna, who was seven when her brother was diagnosed, has embraced her role as Manoli's big sister. She understood early on that she would take on a sibling-caregivers role. She has become a sibling advocate, often defending his rights or standing up for him when he is misunderstood, either when describing his condition and challenges to his teachers or doctors, or even to friends.

While this role has been a challenge for Anna, especially when she is trying to navigate her own understanding of what her brother experiences, her sibling relationship has clearly had a positive influence on her. Anna is now working on a Master of Science and Neuroscience at McGill University, with the goal of becoming a

neuropsychologist. Her research focuses on neurodevelopmental disabilities and coping during the pandemic, examining if policies established during the pandemic actually aligned with the family's needs.

We continue our journey with great optimism for our children's futures. We couldn't be more proud of them! ■

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



by
Steven Atme

Whimsical with Animusical!

Last spring, an unexpected idea occurred. Spiritual and Community animator with the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) Rocco Speranza sent me an email asking with excitement, "What do you think of combining both animal and music therapy?"

My response? "Uh, let me think about it... Yes, please!"

Then came the question of how we would work this out. For instance, when animals hear relaxing live music, they become happy and fall asleep. After all, both humans and animals are so much alike. Animal sounds are like our singing voices. Then came the name, "Animusical."

The pilot project started with a dog named Mindy, who was brought into classrooms at Edward Murphy Elementary School in May 2022. No one knew what to expect. Has it become part of the routine? Was there a test? On the contrary, it was all fun!

We received great feedback, and after summer vacation we started to bring Animusical to Edward Murphy Elementary and L.I.N.K.S. High School twice a month. Beforehand, Rocco and I would exchange ideas on different themes with some requests from students that included things like music, meditation, sing-along, dance, pet Mindy and more. In multiple cases, we improvised!

Students come into class carrying emotional baggage and needing a break. Some don't have pets or haven't experienced the arts. By having them pet Mindy, it brings

calmness and smiles. With music, it brings movement and laughter. Animation included!

With anxiety coming from Covid-19, fears of falling behind, getting sick or having difficult situations at home, some were sad or shy to speak about their worries. But through their talents and abilities, they were able to build self-confidence until they felt more positive and could head back to class.

Through music, we find our balance and stay grounded, focusing on the present. Even during the first day at L.I.N.K.S., a teacher came up to us afterwards in tears, saying, "This was the best medicine I've received in a long while. I truly needed that.



From left: Steven Atme, Alana Goodings, Loretta Varano, Rocco Speranza and Sandra Greco. |

"Thank you!" Rocco, Mindy and I encourage everyone to come in, interact, express themselves, have fun and feel good.

Instead of watching the show, everyone participates, making them THE greatest show being, "Whimsical with Animusical"! That's a cherry on the cake. ■

Steven Atme is a pianist and composer, gives private piano lessons and is a public speaker, enlightening on his experience growing up and living with autism. Contact Steven at atmepianosphd@hotmail.com.

Galileo SI students transform room into Wellness Corner

by *Vera Tronca*

The beginning of this school year marked a fresh start at Galileo Adult Education Centre of the English Montreal School Board, and with each start comes new ideas filled with new hopes for a new beginning.

Social Integration (SI) students from the first floor were dreaming of a calm area, where they could go to unwind, gather their thoughts and emotions, and refresh their minds. To gain inspiration, students agreed to use an existing, empty space to create this space.

Over a span of three weeks, the hard-working students were relentless in their attempt to revamp this room. Using work skills, they moved old furniture out; unpacked boxes and sorted out their contents; assembled new furniture; and cleaned and organized for the grand opening. They

truly embraced the meaning of collaboration and teamwork as they communicated their ideas and helped each other transform an old space into their very own Wellness Corner. The name was selected to embody the different methods of taking care of their well-being: reading, relaxing or playing board games.

SI students use their Wellness Corner throughout the day to relax in the mornings before starting class and as a quiet, reading period in the afternoons. The calmness emanating from the room provides them with the encouragement to self-regulate and helps manage their emotions when their energy levels are high or over-stimulated. It provides students the power to identify and cope with their triggers, which, in turn, improves overall classroom behaviour.

To encourage autonomy, tasks such as turning off lamps and cleaning up afterwards are delegated daily to students to help keep their Wellness Corner clean, organized and ready for the next day.


Together with their teachers' guidance, students gave an ordinary room a major face-lift. Today, SI students can finally enjoy a meaningful and useful space they have created collaboratively as one big Galileo family. ■

The following social integration teachers and facilitators helped bring the project to life: Lu Termini, Vanessa Mazzilli, Brigida Zappia, Caroline Jelovcic, Nancy Ruscitto, Lisa Germile and Natalia B. Iammatteo.

Vera Tronca is a Social Integration teacher at Galileo Adult Education Centre.



A group of students enjoy playing a board game and reading in Galileo's new Wellness Corner in September. Photo courtesy of Galileo



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Wagar interns get creative with *Inspirations*

This school year, *Inspirations* is pleased to be hosting two graphic design interns from Wagar Adult Education Centre of the English Montreal School Board. Since January, Michael Rivard and Nathan Stacey have been coming to work at the *Inspirations* office, located at the board's head office, two days a week. They've been applying the skills they've learned in the classroom to a variety of projects, including designing ads (some of which are in this edition), updating *Inspirations'* and school websites, and creating flyers, logos and graphics (which you can see on our social media feeds). This continues the partnership that began last Spring when *Inspirations* provided Wagar students with in-class projects.

"This has been the perfect experience to spread my graphic wings," said Stacey.

"Being around experts is expediting the learning process. We're getting better, faster and more confident as we flex our creative muscles," said Rivard.

Inspirations is grateful for the creativity, enthusiasm and fresh perspectives that Rivard and Stacey are bringing to the publication. Thank you for your collaboration on this edition!

- Wendy Singer



Nathan Stacey, left, and Michael Rivard take a break during their internships for a photo op at the English Montreal School Board on March 14. Photo: Mark Bergman

EMSB Art Co-op merges education with community

by *Wendy Singer*

Artist and Social Integration (SI) teacher at Wagar Adult Education Centre Anna Persichilli has a dream of setting up a community art studio that would immerse her students in the world of art; a place outside of the classroom, where their talents would be honed, shared and valued. All she needed to make this happen was a committed community partner.

With perseverance and the help of colleague, artist and SI teacher Natalie Reis, Persichilli's dream is about to come true. The English Montreal School Board (EMSB) Art Co-op is slated to open its doors for the 2023-24 school year in partnership with the Visual Art Centre's (VAC), ARTreach Programme.

Located in Westmount, ARTreach has been bringing art education into the community for over 25 years. Amber Berson, executive

director of the VAC, explained that, traditionally, VAC teachers are sent to schools and organizations upon request. In the case of the EMSB Art Co-op, students will have their own dedicated art studio and teacher at the VAC, and access to all mediums and genres available, from ceramics to fibre, painting, mixed media and printmaking, five days a week.

The Co-op will follow the same curriculum as Persichilli's Art & Soul Social Integration classroom at Wagar, located in Côte Saint-Luc, where she weaves art-making with community integration, and life and social skills. Professional arts training and development, like how to apply to galleries or write a grant, will be added. "The EMSB Art Co-op is for the artist at heart. It will function as an educational site, where participants create art and contribute to all aspects of an artist-run collective," she said.

Persichilli was inspired by the Creative Growth Center in Oakland, California, which hosts some 162 artists with disabilities, some of whom have had their work exhibited in prestigious modern art museums. This is precisely her goal: "Our students create wonderful works of art, and I feel they need to be seen."

Wagar students have been getting acquainted with the VAC this year, attending monthly artist talks and workshops. "The artists will be better set up for large-scale artmaking here. They produce beautiful work, and we look forward to showing it at an exhibition at the end of the year," said Berson.

The VAC is working towards the goal of



From left: Marie-Renée Vial, Antoine Chu, Amber Berson, Jessica Teixeira-Pinto, Juana Iggyook-Onningnak and Anna Persichilli visit Kama La Mackerel's exhibition *Who sings the queer island body?* at the Visual Arts Centre on March 24.

universal accessibility. Currently, some of their studios are physically accessible, as is the gallery, and one washroom is fully accessible. Teachers are trained to work with varying needs in the classroom. "This is a major win for inclusivity and integration in our community," said Persichilli. ■

An interview is required to be accepted into the EMSB Art Co-op. For information, contact Jennifer Campbell at jcampbell@emsb.qc.ca. To learn more about the VAC's ARTreach Programme, visit www.visualartscentre.ca.

Mindfulness of Emotions creates space

by *Danika Swanson*

As I'm writing this, signs of spring are popping up all around me.

While in last year's springtime edition, we focused on the changing landscape outside with the practice of Mindful Seeing, looking mindfully, or noticing what we see around us, this year we turn our attention to the changing landscape inside with the practice of Mindfulness of Emotions.

Remember, mindfulness means paying attention, on purpose, with curiosity and kindness. In the practice of mindfulness, we can choose to pay attention to many things: Our breath, sounds, thoughts, sensations, what we see, and more. In this practice, we focus our attention on our emotions and use emotion words as the anchor that holds our attention in place.

The practice of Mindfulness of Emotions is beneficial in that it enhances emotional literacy, which is our ability to recognize, understand, label and manage our emotions in a positive manner. Sometimes when we experience intense emotions, like anger, we say or do something that later we wish we could take back. This practice helps create more space between a strong emotion and our action, which allows us to choose words or actions more likely to meet our needs, and less likely to hurt ourselves or others.

The first part of this practice involves increasing our emotional vocabulary. For younger kids, start with reviewing basic emotions: happy, sad, scared, angry, excited, etc. You can play with naming emotions and asking your child to show that emotion on their face. Or show it on your face and ask your child to guess the emotion. Ask

your child what they noticed or felt in their facial expression and body with different emotions.

For older children (and adults!) work on expanding your emotional vocabulary. Choose a few emotions (happy, sad, excited, nervous, bored, curious, restless, peaceful, confused, confident, embarrassed, proud, angry, grateful, etc.) and say them out loud. What do you think or feel when you hear various emotions? What thoughts arise in your mind? What do you feel in your body? Some examples might be to notice if your hands are clenched or open? Is your jaw tense or relaxed? Is your heartbeat fast or slow? Do you feel warmth or coolness, etc.? It is important to note that while we might experience some emotions as more or less pleasant, there are no "good" or "bad" emotions. All emotions communicate important information.

The second part of the practice is a more "formal" practice:

- Pick a mindful posture that works for you and let your eyes close or gaze softly in front of you.
- Notice how you feel. Bring your attention to your preferred anchor – feet on

the ground, inhalation and exhalation, sensation of sitting, etc.

- Sit for a few minutes. If you notice an emotion, use an anchor word, such as "anger, anger," or "sadness, sadness." Say it a few times silently in your mind.
- What emotions, sensations or thoughts did you notice? Are some emotions easier or more challenging for you to pay attention to?

Resources:

- The opening scene of the movie *Inside Out* (Disney Plus).
- Name That Emotion with Murray! (On Sesame Street's YouTube channel)
- Mood Meter Chart (www.marcbrackett.com, under About)
- List of Feelings (www.cnvc.org, choose Site Map then chose Feelings Inventory) ■

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

Power Buddies MTL: Where friends meet for adapted physical activity

by *Nicole Proano*

Troupe. Gang. Crew. Posse. There are many labels that can describe a group of friends who get together regularly to hang out and catch up. Yet this group calls itself by another name: Power Buddies MTL.

It began as a small handful of neurodivergent young adults who met up on Zoom during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic to participate in a physical activity, like yoga, dancing or boxing. Since then, it has grown into a larger community of friends who meet routinely for excursions organized by the group's co-founders, Muhan Patel, Ghida Monla and Petros Lazanis.

Patel, a Physical Education student at McGill University, said Power Buddies was a way to sustain the relationships made

with people he worked with while coaching an adapted basketball team, working at Peter Hall School and a sleepaway summer camp for young adults.

For Patel, a guiding question that fuelled Power Buddies was “how are we going to make this our own thing and not just be staff members at a camp who disappear until the next [year]?”

In its early stages, Power Buddies grew through word of mouth. Once they were allowed to begin in-person activities, relationships within the group grew stronger. “We’ve become a family that meets up every week,” Patel said.

The group activities Power Buddies now engage in tend to be seasonal. There will be Zumba outside in the park when the weather allows, or a team sport like soccer or basketball. During the winter months, bowling is a group favourite, but trips



Power Buddies meet for an afternoon of bowling at Quilles G Plus Rose Bowl on March 19. From left, back row: Jonah Davis Yanofsky, Jonathan Corin, Petros Lazanis, Dayna Wiseman and Shaun Benharroch. Front row: Ariel Mechaly, Ghida Monla, Muhan Patel. Photo: Wendy Singer

to the Biodôme, the Montreal Science Centre and the Aquadôme are also highly anticipated.

To maintain the adult quality of conversations that can comfortably be had, members must be 18 years and over. Everyone must pay their own way for costs associated with the activity of the week, but there are no additional fees aside from that.

Inclusion was an unexpected result of Power Buddies and is now a secondary goal. “It’s also about bridging the divide,” Patel said. “We didn’t push any inclusion on other people, but inclusion became second nature once they became friends with participants.” ■

For information or to inquire about joining, visit powerbuddiesmtl.com.

Une bibliothèque à nous

Le personnel et les élèves des services d’intégration socioprofessionnelle (SISP) du Centre d’éducation des adultes Galileo ont créé, en novembre et en décembre, une bibliothèque en vue d’offrir aux élèves un espace calme où ils peuvent lire, découvrir différents types de livres et interagir entre eux en jouant à des jeux de société ou en dénouant des énigmes. La touche finale a été apportée au retour du congé des Fêtes.

La planification a joué un rôle essentiel dans la création de cette bibliothèque. Vanessa, une élève de la classe de M^{me} Claudia et de M^{me} Flora, a mis à contribution ses talents artistiques pour peindre la porte d’entrée ainsi qu’une toile qui tapisse désormais l’un des murs de notre bibliothèque. En guise d’inspiration, on lui a demandé de peindre une image qu’elle associe au mot « bibliothèque ».

Les rayons de la bibliothèque sont garnis de livres et de jeux, grâce aux dons des élèves et des membres du personnel. L’éclairage



Des élèves de Galileo découvrent des ouvrages dans leur bibliothèque rénovée.

doux, la touche de verdure et les diverses options de sièges contribuent à créer une atmosphère sereine pour les élèves. Les enseignantes de Vanessa, de concert avec les enseignantes Marisa Filiberti et Julie Mancini, ont veillé à l’aménagement de l’espace afin que nos élèves s’y sentent moins anxieux et plus détendus. ■

– M. Filiberti, J. Mancini et C. Rugamas



Adam’s P.A.C.E. students join other leaders at retreat

Students from Adam’s P.A.C.E., a youth sector program offering individualized academics at Champlain College, from left, Johnny Viron, Donnick Patrice, Sarah Bouchard and Paige Nimis, attended a leadership retreat for 40 students at the Notre-Dame-de-Fatima Centre Plein-Air in L’Île-Perrot on January 13 and 14. Organized by the Department of Student Services, the retreat aims to unite student leaders from various groups, clubs,

student initiatives and teams to give them the opportunity to learn about themselves and others through various workshops. This year’s theme was “Roots to Rise.” Two Adam’s P.A.C.E. students were asked to lead energizer activities. “Every year, I am amazed by our students and how much they grow over the course of these 48 hours!” said Adam’s P.A.C.E. teacher Natalie Henri.

– Kristin McNeill

Poillievre ◀ Cont'd from p. 31

members of children, particularly, who are afflicted with autism spectrum disorder,” said Housakos. “They say, ‘Senator, we feel alone. We feel helpless.’ If our institution can pass this bill and send it to the other place, calling for what has been needed for a long time – a national framework to serve as a springboard that will hopefully become a national strategy on autism – then we can send a clear message to those Canadian families, grandparents, parents, brothers, sisters and friends who are dealing with the challenges of autism: We have been hearing you. We are listening. You’re not alone, and you’re not helpless. We feel you, we will respond, and we will be there in solidarity. Because at the end of the day, those are just words for me. I think a society can only achieve its true greatness if we use our resources to make sure that no child is left behind and that we take advantage of the wonderful skill sets every Canadian has to offer.”

During the reading of the bill, Senator Tony Loffreda provided his strong support as well. “Senator Housakos and I worked on some community initiatives that would provide adequate, affordable and tailored programs and services to people with autism spectrum disorder,” he said. “One example is Giant Steps, a school in Montreal. This bill is relatively simple. It would enable

the federal minister of health to establish a federal framework on autism spectrum disorder, in consultation and partnership with other ministers, with the provinces and with stakeholders.”

In the House of Commons discussion on the bill, Alberta Conservative MP Mike Lake, the father of an autistic son, noted that for anybody who has been working in this area over the years, there is a real impatience right now. “It has been many years that we have been talking about a national strategy,” he commented. “I think it is an opportunity to move forward, with some of that impatience, yes, but with real hope for the future for people with autism in this country and the people who care about people with autism.”

Poillievre told his Wagar audience: “I want to be the champion for all of the people with autism. It is our job to make the world a welcoming place. We want a system that works for the people; not people working for the system. When the next election takes place, our party will have important policies to present.”

The most interesting aspect of the meeting was Poillievre and his wife asking questions to the experts. It was an excellent dialogue and a good example for other party leaders to follow. ■



From left: Kessem Vaknin, Esther Lowen, Cass Ranger and Sarah Aspler at L'Annexe's art exhibition in honour of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month on February 15 at the Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA. Photo: PBL Photography

L'Annexe moves ‘From Strength to Strength’ with vernissage

L'Annexe's (Agence Ometz's Centre for Young Adults) vernissage, “From Strength to Strength,” demonstrated that amazing things can happen when a community works together. They were happy to host this event at the Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA on February 15 after sharing the inaugural one online last year.

Over 37 multigenerational artists from partnering organizations Ometz, Cummings Centre, Alink, Moishe House and the Sylvan Adams YM-YWHA exhibited their creative works with pride. While mingling with guests, they were enlightening about their methods and what inspires

them to create. An array of genres was on display, including painting, comic art, poetry and embroidery.

To top off the exhibition in celebration of Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month, Zera Café was on hand to offer cakes and their delicious halva-tahina brownies. ■

Listen to Mark Bergman's podcast “Meet two incredibly talented artists” at www.inspirationsnews.com/inspirations/podcasts.

-Wendy Singer

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You Are Love a balm for unhappy emotions

by *Roanne Weisman*

The words are simple. The wisdom is profound. The illustrations are magical. *You Are Love* distills ancient spiritual truths into a message, which bypasses the intellect and goes directly to the heart. Author Lauren Tatner and illustrator Angelina Doherty together captivate readers of all ages by reminding us what we were born knowing: Tatner writes, “Your happiness comes from within. You have your own internal guidance system (your emotions). You are special just as you are. Your natural state is one of well-being. You have the ability to create anything you want. Your main purpose in life is to have fun. You are energy at your core and that energy is love.”

This 40-page book is a balm for the anxiety, fear and loneliness experienced by so many. Tatner helps readers to simply stop. Follow the breath. Focus on finding the feathers hidden in the illustrations “as a sign from your angels that you are never alone.”

The granddaughter of Holocaust survivors, Tatner is able to guide children and adults through simple interactive practices that show how we are connected to the wisdom of generations of ancestors from many cultures throughout the world. The gentle, wise teachings share a knowledge of the soul that transcends time and space: We are all connected, and the force that unites us is love. ■



Lauren Tatner reading *You Are Love* to her daughters.
Photo courtesy of L. Tatner

Rose et la machine présentée pour la dernière fois devant un public déjà conquis d'avance

par *Jordan Stoopler*



Maude Laurendeau, gauche, et Julie Le Breton.
Photo : Maxime Côté

Dans le cadre de sa tournée à travers différentes salles de spectacles du Québec, la pièce *Rose et la machine* des Productions Porte Parole a été vue par des milliers de gens. Pour cette dernière de 24 représentations, depuis le début de 2023, présentée au mois de mars dernier à l'Es-space le vrai monde du Collège Ahuntsic, l'auditoire était composé principalement de parents et d'éducateurs d'enfants autistes de l'école À Pas de géant, invités gratuitement pour l'occasion grâce à la Fondation À pas de géant.

Cette production théâtrale de style « documentaire » raconte le parcours d'une mère (Maude Laurendeau) qui cherche à mieux comprendre et soutenir sa fille Rose, diagnostiquée avec un trouble du spectre de l'autisme (TSA). La comédienne Julie Le Breton, belle-sœur de Maude dans la vraie vie, incarne pas moins de 44 personnages différents, dont des professionnels de la santé, des éducateurs, des enseignants et des parents, entre autres, que Maude croise sur son chemin. Ces personnages et leurs

propos sont tirés directement de conversations enregistrées et d'entrevues réalisées par Maude pendant ses nombreuses années de recherche.

Mise en scène par Édith Patenaude, la pièce aborde plusieurs obstacles auxquels sont souvent confrontés les parents d'enfants autistes, notamment les interminables listes d'attente pour accéder aux services dans le réseau public de la santé (et les coûts exorbitants des thérapies privées) de même que les difficultés associées à l'intégration de leur enfant dans une classe d'école. Il y est aussi question des effets de la pandémie et du confinement ayant entraîné la fermeture des écoles, dont celle de Rose.

À la fin de la prestation de près de deux heures, Maude Laurendeau et Édith Patenaude ont eu droit à une longue ovation debout de la part de la foule. Les membres du public ont certainement pu compatir avec Maude et ses péripéties, sachant désormais hors de tout doute qu'ils ne sont pas seuls. ■



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Curtains up for all abilities

by *Randy Pinsky*

“Accessibility, in my mind, is inherently artistic,” stated multi-award-winning disabled performer, advocate and producer, Ophira Calof. “Finding ways to navigate a world not made for you takes creativity.”

Calof presented “Stories that Shape Us: Storytelling, Disability and Community Care” as part of Temple Emanu-El-Beth Sholom’s online event celebrating Jewish Disability Awareness, Acceptance and Inclusion Month (JDAAIM) on February 21.

Inspired by the intersection of community arts and disability culture, Calof’s consulting company “#CriptheScript” reclaims the word “crippled” in order to “center disability knowledge and experience throughout process, production, and presentation” in all forms of performance.

In a February interview with *The Canadian Jewish News*, Calof described a commitment to creating opportunities for disabled artists “who just need the space to tell the[ir] stories on their own terms.”

Calof’s credits include *TallBoyz* (CBC), *Kids In the Hall* (Amazon Prime) and *Generally Hospital* (a Canadian Comedy Award Nominee). The one-woman show *Literally Titanium* has been featured in both performance and academic spaces as a case study in accessible production.

The Temple talk addressed several misconceptions about disability. For instance, expressions such as “wheelchair-bound” may be interpreted as implying confinement instead of freedom – a message explored in Calof’s Broadway-type parody, *Me and My Wheelchair*, performed at Chicago’s Second City’s 2018 Diversity Fellowship Showcase.

Calof’s recent disability arts projects include “Making Space: Stories of Disabled Youth, Past and Present” with Myseum Toronto/RAFTO, and Dis/Play, where pieces made by Deaf or disabled artists were projected onto Toronto’s public buildings, one simply stating, “I AM HERE.”

On a mission to contest assumptions and make the Canadian entertainment industry more inclusive, Calof is also the accessibility process lead for AccessCBC, a CBC initiative for creators with a disability and creative director of the Accessible Writers’ Lab sponsored by the Canada Media Fund.

An active member of the Jewish community, Calof noted the “hopefulness” of the JDAAIM month while also expressing mixed feelings as “I’m disabled 365 days of the year.”

While noting how the Jewish community has demonstrated leadership in inclusive programming, Calof has observed that people with disabilities do not want to be recipients of *tzedakah* (charity), but instead accepted just as they are.

As a gesture of inclusion and accommodation to congregants with different challenges including invisible disabilities, Rabbi Lisa Gruschow of Temple invites members to “rise in body or in spirit” as a way to take part if they are unable to stand up during services.

In wrapping up the talk, Calof challenged congregants to move beyond a “check-box” approach to inclusion, which is often reactive or complaints-based, to a more proactive and accepting one. “How can we build a more just space, a more just community, where all bodies and minds can thrive?” ■



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The smiles say it all at a winter session of a specially designed art class for neurodiverse adults given every Sunday at the Dollard Centre for the Arts. Photo courtesy of Dollard Centre for the Arts

Art class for adults in DDO provides creative outlet

As a neurodiverse adult, long-time West Island resident Laura Harris sought to establish an art class geared towards other 18 and older neurodiverse adults living in the community. “Art has always been a creative outlet for me, and I wanted to find a way to offer classes to others,” she said.

Held at the Dollard-Des-Ormeaux Civic Centre at the Dollard Centre for the Arts, the class meets every Sunday afternoon in the fully appointed art studio. “With

our wonderful teacher Keyiana, we work with water colours, practice drawing and work in mixed media,” Harris explained. “The sessions are relaxing and fun, and we learn about and produce art, while socializing and building friendships.”

Classes run for eight weeks every Sunday from 2:30 to 4:30 pm. For more information: www.centreartsdollard.com or 514.684.1012, ext. 213.

- Anita Szabadi-Gottesman

by Sarah Lynch

Olympics events in the offing

A new collaboration between the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) and Special Olympics Quebec was established this year, led by the Centre of Excellence for the Physically, Intellectually and Multi-Challenged (CoE PIM), the EMSB's department of Student Services and department of Educational Services.

CoE PIM coordinators, Claudia De Luca, Sarah Lynch and Sophia Orfanos, worked with EMSB Health and Physical Education Consultant Katherine Baker to organize an in-school training program for seven EMSB schools, which was held in October. This was followed by a smaller sporting event for participants led by leadership students at Lester B. Pearson High School in conjunction with Special Olympics Quebec. The participants also received a physiotherapy screening at McGill.

Another training session was set to be offered in March to new and interested schools, to be followed by two additional opportunities for students to participate in sporting activities hosted by the EMSB. These include an activity day at McGill in May and an Olympiade in June. In addition, approximately 50 participating students will receive a dental screening.

As this is the first collaboration between the organizations, the objective was to increase the number of participating students and schools and continue to expand collaboration with other school boards. ■

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



Physical Education teachers from the EMSB watch as Diana Piazza demonstrates how to adapt activities following a training session provided by Special Olympics Quebec October 28 at Parkdale Elementary School.

New youth hockey program opens up the sport

by Jordan Stoopler

Seven-year-old Yaakov Aintabi has no trouble waking up early on Sunday mornings.

"It is the only day my son is happy," said his mother, Ariel Davidson. "He wakes me up at 7:20 in the morning, telling me we're going to be late for hockey if I don't get up."

Yaakov is a goaltender and a regular at the Avalanche Kidz Hockey program, which runs out of Ed Meagher Arena in NDG. The learn-to-skate and hockey-skills development program, geared towards special needs children between the ages of four and 11, was the brainchild of Davidson, as she sought a group that would accommodate her special needs son.

"I tried to put my son in minor hockey first, but he was refused," said Davidson. "They told me he would just end up on the bench and that it wasn't a good idea. There are many children in the same boat as Yaakov and so, we created something."

Davidson turned to the founder of the Quebec Avalanche Hockey Club, Vinnie Matteo, to help get the program off the ground. Matteo, who has operated his hockey program for over 40 years, brought in his daughter Linda Matteo, a hockey player herself for 25 years, to serve as head coach. Additional certified coaches and student volunteers from local high schools round out the on-ice staff.

"The program is designed around mentorship, leadership and recognizing that hockey is for everyone," said Linda. "We made this program affordable and accessible. It doesn't matter if your child has a specific disorder or not. We are here to make sure that everyone comes together, and [that] we enjoy the sport."

The program began this past September with 30 participants, with enrollment nearly doubling to 57 in January. Davidson said more than 100 have already pre-registered

for the program next year. Almost half of the registrants are autistic kids or those with developmental delays or gravitational insecurities.

"It is non-competitive and adapted to each person's individual needs," said Davidson. "They play games against themselves, and we purposely don't keep score. Everybody is a winner. It's about making the kids feel comfortable and having fun. They like being a part of something."

In recent months, those in low-income families and Ukrainian refugees new to Canada have also signed on.

"There are some language barriers, but once we hit the ice, we all speak the universal language of hockey," said Linda. "You don't see colour, religion or nationality until you turn around and look at the parents in the stands."

She takes great pride in the program and recognizes the value it has brought to her life so far.

"It is so rewarding," she said. "It's not about what I am doing for them, but what they are doing for me. I'm so grateful and appreciative for everything that I see and learn."



Yaakov Aintabi loves the Zamboni, watching as it cleans the ice long after practice has ended in January.

I've matured and grown myself. I love working with these kids." ■

Registration for next season (September 2023-April 2024) is scheduled for this summer. Participants must be between the ages of four to 13, be mobile, verbal and able to wear a helmet. <https://avalanchekidz.ca>.

Avalanche Kidz is also in search of jersey and equipment sponsors as well as volunteers with experience working with special needs children who know how to skate. Please contact Linda Matteo at avalanchekidz@gmail.com for sponsorship and volunteer opportunities.

by *Mike Cohen*



The dining room at Lloyd

Lloyd Restaurant

The Marriott Château Champlain downtown is now home to Lloyd Restaurant. The 200-seat venue, which includes a 60-seat private room, has menu items such as shrimp tartar with vanilla and exotic fruit gazpacho or pressed foie gras with Tahitian chutney. More classic dishes like the AAA beef flank steak with shallots or the decadent burger with caramelized onions and organic Comtomme cheese from Quebec will please all palates. As for the desserts, the Pistachio (pistachio cream and mango confit, mango sorbet, green apple, coriander and olive oil) and Temptation (shortbread cookie, white

chocolate cream, turmeric cookie, raspberry and tomato confit, and lychee and tomato sorbet) are the most highly touted. There is a wheelchair-accessible walkway leading directly to the restaurant a few steps away from the main hotel entrance. Washrooms are also situated at the same level as the dining rooms, and there are no stairs. Lloyd is located at 1050 rue de la Gauchetière Ouest.

It is open Monday to Friday, from 6:30 am to 10 pm and weekends from 7 am to 1 pm and 5 pm to 10 pm.

Marathon Souvlaki

With three dine-in locations near Decarie Boulevard, in Dollard des Ormeaux and Chomedey and a takeout and delivery spot in Laval, this 45-year-old family-run operation remains noted for friendly prices, signature entrées, great salads, superb souvlaki and sizeable plates and combos. All the products are replenished fresh each day. I recently enjoyed a delicious dinner at the Decarie locale, starting off by sharing some taramosalata with warm pita, a basket of garlic bread, a crispy plate of calamari and a large Marathon salad (lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, onions, Greek olives, feta cheese, oregano and their famous house dressing). I ordered the four marinated lamb chops with their trademark fries. My friend opted for the

filet mignon brochette. We were both too full for dessert, so we took home decadent pieces of Marathon's Chocolate Prestige Cake. The Decarie location has an accessible entry and parking spots.



Some of the delicious items from Marathon

Salvatoré

With 61 franchises and counting, Salvatoré is one of my new pizza discoveries. I have visited the Dollard des Ormeaux and St. Léonard locations. They are both storefronts, designed for pickup and delivery only. For the latter, they use their own vehicles. Customers with mobility challenges can also choose a curbside handoff. The DDO and St. Léonard entrances are both accessible by wheelchair.

The business was established by the Abbatiello family in 1964, and today, five of the founders' grandchildren are in charge. I chose one of their trademarks: a 12-inch Chinese Fondue Pizza. It was superb. The sauce was made with fondue broth and topped with mushrooms, cheese, marinated beef, red onions and broccoli. There are also three fondue dips. I decided to order something to drop off for my mom and that turned out to be the BBQ Chicken Pizza, featuring spicy whisky BBQ sauce, chicken, cheese, red

onions, fresh tomatoes and green onions. Since my plan was to order enough to have for supper the following evening, I also ordered six plain chicken wings (they have a variety of choices). These crispy wings are served with a side of ranch sauce for dipping. I also added a side of fries. The Poutine Tao tempted me, and so did some of the other pizza options. But those will have to wait until next time! Oh, and I cannot forget about dessert: A decadent hot and soft eight-inch cookie sprinkled with crushed M&Ms. There were eight portions that lasted me all weekend.



The Chinese Fondue Pizza



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Fort Lauderdale: A sunny year-round destination that offers accessible tourism

by *Alexandra Cohen*

This past winter, I was thrilled to make an escape for a getaway to the sunny state of Florida. For the first time, I had the opportunity to visit Fort Lauderdale, which was a real treat. Last summer, “Visit Lauderdale” launched its new VisitLauderdale.com destination website, which includes an accessibility microsite in recognition of the tourism bureau’s new focus on accessible travel as part of its commitment to inclusion. For example, there are a number of beach entrances that are accessible to wheelchairs.

Many Greater Fort Lauderdale hotels, restaurants and attractions create welcoming spaces, with many that include accessible rooms (some specially equipped for the hearing-impaired), as well as wheelchair ramps, accessible outdoor dining spaces with spacious outdoor patios, special sensory-inclusive websites and sensory-sensitive live performances such as those offered at the Broward Center for the Performing Arts. Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International Airport uses the Hidden Disabilities Sunflower Program with a mission to provide a discreet way for adults and children with hidden disabilities to show that they need additional support or just a little more time with airport processes. In terms of arts and entertainment venues, The Broward Center for the Performing Arts and The Parker both feature accessible amenities so everyone can enjoy a night at the theatre.

Where to stay

There are close to 600 lodging establishments, with more than 37,000 hotel rooms in the area. During my trip, I chose to stay

at the B Ocean Resort, which many people may remember as the former Sheraton Yankee Clipper. In terms of accessibility, the hotel has ramps at the pool, which is also connected to the beach. There is also a ramp available to connect the hotel’s different towers. Both pools feature ADA pool lifts. The resort offers valet parking at the main entrance. There are guest rooms available that feature roll-in showers or accessible bathtubs.

We were thrilled to discover that The B Hotel & Resort partners with the award-winning Boucher Brothers Management in order to pamper guests with deluxe seating while at the beach.

Dining out

There are more than 4,000 wining and dining establishments and 132 nightclubs in Broward County. I experienced a few places during my stay.

Let’s start off with the Naked Crab Seafood Kitchen + Cocktail Bar, which was conveniently located right in our hotel lobby at the B Ocean Hotel and Resort. It was a most convenient place to dine after checking in right at dinnertime. The menu is sourced locally using fresh seafood and produce from local farms. To sample some items on the menu, I tried the crab cake as an appetizer, as well as the scallop risotto and the particularly tasty branzino. This was capped off with some tiramisu for dessert, which was also delicious.

We also experienced Matchbox Restaurant, part of an American chain that opened in 2003. Matchbox currently has 15 locations in the US, including in Las Olas, Fort Lauderdale, which opened in early 2022 and has become known for brick oven pizzas, mini burgers, fresh salads and chef-inspired entrées like Miso salmon and chimichurri steak frites. The restaurant offers several wheelchair accessible tables and a lowered bar area, as well as compliant restrooms. To enter from the parking area,



Beach entrances like this are especially adapted for wheelchairs.
Photo courtesy of Visit Fort Lauderdale

guests can use a ramp for the sidewalk/courtyard.

I had the privilege of enjoying a meal at the Lobster Bar Sea Grille while in Fort Lauderdale. The restaurant, located on East Los Olas, offers an extensive selection of seafood, including, as its name suggests, a large array of lobster dishes.

During my meal, I had the opportunity to taste some oysters, the restaurant’s famed lobster morsels (lightly fried lobster with Greek honey-mustard aioli), Dover sole

served with brown butter and a side dish of quinoa mixed with kale, the decadent Whole Lobster & Black Winter Truffle risotto dish, as well as some profiteroles to end the meal on a sweet note. Everything was delicious! The restaurant is fully code compliant with regards to wheelchair accessibility. It seats about 175 indoors and 50 outdoors, and also features two private rooms (one seating up to 60 and one up to 80).

Yes, indeed, Fort Lauderdale is a wonderful place to visit. ■

INSPIRATIONS NEWS
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Promo 21 and Action Centre print together

by *Randy Pinsky*

The cold rainy weather on December 6 did not dampen the enthusiasm of Action Centre members during a visit to the Promo 21 t-shirt printing company. Located in the Chabanel garment district, Promo 21 trains and hires neuro-diverse adults and frequently hosts demonstrations.

The visitors, who have physical disabilities, were excited to print shirts they designed with “I don’t need easy, I just need possible” - a quote coined by Hawaiian pro-surfer Bethany Hamilton who lost her left arm in a shark attack.

“Living life without limits” is Action Centre’s mantra, with programs designed to “foster a sense of belonging, self-esteem and increased autonomy” such as music, art, bowling and cooking, with partners like Centre de ressources éducatives et pédagogiques, and the English Montreal School Board’s Adult Education and Vocational Services.

“When they closed the Lethbridge day program, we had to do something,” stated founder Daniel Jarry. The Centre was thus started as a post-physio meeting place in Pointe-St-Charles and then LaSalle, where it had been for the past 23 years. They recently moved to a new location in Saint-Laurent.

The idea for Promo 21 was sparked when founder Martin Gould realized there were few career options for autistic adults. His girlfriend Lydia Mamane’s son, 21-year-old Aaron, had aged out of the school and government-supported programs. “There was nowhere for him to go,” recalled Mamane, now president of the board of directors.

After evaluating various options, Gould modelled the company after a New York printing initiative, and since its launch in 2019, Promo 21 “just exploded.” He described it as a place where adults with special needs can “develop and grow both on a professional and personal level.” Silk screening is ideal for individuals on the

spectrum as many work well with a predictable and logical sequence of tasks. The company recognizes the needs and triggers of its employees and adapts accordingly, such as providing noise-canceling headphones or physical accommodation.

The focus is on the unique skills of each worker. “I don’t like to say disabilities; it’s more [about] abilities,” emphasized Mamane. New employee Jean Duvel echoed, “It’s special. It’s a good place to work if you have a particular need.”

Mamane expressed her gratitude to Promo 21 for being an instrumental stepping stone for her son. “Aaron would have never been able to move onwards without the skills

learned here,” she said. “He gained a sense of fulfillment and purpose.”



Promo 21 founder Martin Gould demonstrates the fine art of silk screening to members of Action Centre on December 6.

She continued, “[People with special needs] are excellent employees because they have more to prove. They just need the chance.”

For information about Promo 21, visit www.promo21.org. For the Action Centre, visit www.centreaction.org.

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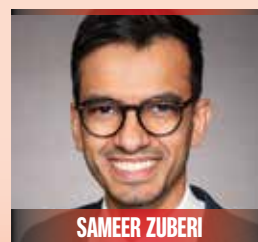
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