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RELAXED AND READY TO PERFORM

Sarah Sinacore
performs at the Segal Centre for
Performing Arts' "relaxed performance"
of A Century Songbook on June 27.
(Photo, Leslie Schachter)

Read the full story about the Segal Centre's
push to make theatre accessible to all in the
Arts & Entertainment section on p. 34.



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The Dynamic Funds Teachers of Inspiration 2019: EMSB teachers use assistive technology to help students achieve success

Compiled by *Cindy Davis*

The Dynamic Funds Teachers of Inspiration 2019 are the incredible teachers across the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) who have embraced assistive technology (AT) and brought it into their classrooms. AT consultants Andrea Prupas and Olivia Colalillo train and support EMSB elementary and high school teachers on the many applications of AT, so they can in turn help their students who are unable to communicate effectively or have difficulty understanding or processing class material. This is giving students a chance to shine, find their voice and succeed academically.



EMSB elementary school teachers meet for AT training on October 22.

The EMSB is one of the first school boards in Quebec to provide specific AT consulting as its own service. Spearheaded by the Student Services department in collaboration with the Educational and Technology Services department, the AT team provides direct support to students and teachers year-round in mainstream classes and the EMSB's many self-contained classrooms where specialized technologies can make a huge difference.

AT is "any item, piece of equipment, software program, or product system that is

used to increase, maintain, or improve the functional capabilities of persons with disabilities" (Assistive Technology Industry Association, 2018). These tools are benefiting students with learning disabilities, dyslexia, developmental delays and autism. "We can improve access to the curriculum, as well as provide important social and communication supports when we use these technologies," said Prupas.

Prupas and Colalillo customize the intervention to each student's needs with the support

of the teachers and their multidisciplinary teams (occupational therapists, speech-language pathologists, consultants, psychologists and guidance counsellors), who implement and continue the intervention. "Our focus is on increasing accessibility which requires a lot of input from our professionals. This could be finding alternate ways to write for students who are emerging communicators, or using multiple scanning methods so students can access digital documents with their assistive technology," said Colalillo.

Universal literacy support technologies like WordQ/SpeakQ, Read&Write for Google Chrome, Office 365 tools, mobile scanners and iOS Accessibility provide students assistance with reading and writing, including text with text-to-speech, word prediction and speech recognition.

More specialized software to create visuals, and augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) tools are used in specialized classroom settings and include simple systems such as pictures, gestures and core vocabulary boards, as well as more complex techniques involving powerful computer technology to assist students with severe speech or communication delays. They include TouchChat, BoardmakerOnline, Proloquo2Go and Clicker apps.

Though it can be daunting at first, the teachers who have adopted AT have taken on the challenge head on and the results have been remarkable.

Here are some success stories. For an in-depth feature on AT see p. 10 to 14 of this edition.

"One of my students had developed a phobia of reading and writing assignments. His solution to the problem was to act up so that he would be removed from the classroom. Since he has learned to use Read&Write and the Google Speech-to-Text feature, he has become a different person. He finally has a way to take charge of his learning, be more independent and his voice can finally be heard. His assignments now reflect his true abilities rather than his disabilities."

Michelle Santilli,
Pierre de Coubertin Elementary School

"We have the pleasure of working with a bright little girl who has so much to say but didn't yet have the ability to share her knowledge through speech. We set her up with Proloquo4Text AAC app and she took off with it right away. She can now actively participate in calendar, show and tell and answer questions during class time. She has even started adding her own tabs to organize her topics. She is starting to use it to request and communicate with others and seems so proud that she finally has a voice!"

Amanda Dandy,
Coronation Elementary School

"Having laptops in the classroom at my students' disposal changed the way I taught and more importantly the way they wrote. Incorporating Google Classroom and Google Read&Write (just to name a few) completely changed my perspective of my students. One student in particular changed the way he wrote so dramatically that I could not believe what was hiding inside him. The assistive technology helped him visualize his thoughts clearly and having his words read back to him in real time allowed him to understand how to adapt and evolve his writing. From thinking he was dumb and could not read, his confidence has grown and his grades have dramatically improved. Assistive technology has changed him and lifted the veil that allowed me to see what was there all along."

Adriana Chronopoulos, James Lyng
High School (currently at Lester B. Pearson High School)

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Giant Steps takes leadership role to address high unemployment rate of individuals on the autism spectrum

By *Nick Katalifos*

Most would agree that the debate regarding autism services has traditionally been focused upon children, dealing specifically with issues such as research, early diagnosis, therapeutic approaches and education. While the current state of autism services regarding children is obviously of the utmost importance (1 in 66 is diagnosed with autism in Canada, according to the Public Health Agency of Canada), a great deal of significance is now being placed upon the reality that autism affects the entire life span of an individual. Therefore, many advocates are calling for more autism services designed specifically for adults – including the critical need for programs focused on education and training that increase employment potential.

There are some notable examples of efforts involving autism and employment, including companies such as Specialisterne, a human resources firm founded in Denmark and expanded via franchises around the world, Auticon, a multi-national IT consultancy enterprise that exclusively employs autistic adults as IT consultants, and the well-known Walgreens initiative in the United States, spearheaded by corporate leader Randy Lewis. Unfortunately, most would argue that the current efforts, while commendable, are not enough, and while Canadian data is still somewhat limited, most available statistics point to a very challenging situation in which only 10 to 14 percent of individuals with autism are gainfully employed (according to the 2012 Canadian Survey on Disability).

This last fact is what motivated Giant Steps to increase its efforts to provide support and opportunities to its student body and alumni, but also the community at large. First, the school and its Resource and Training Centre will soon begin a pilot project with a large Canadian national retailer whose corporate vision supports the values of neurodiversity and inclusiveness. The multi-pronged project, which also includes the research expertise of the Transforming Autism Care Consortium (TACC), and the Sociovocational Integration Services program (SVIS) of the Wagar Adult Education Centre

(EMSBS) is intended to increase the employment preparedness and success of autistic adults in finding and retaining employment.

Second, Giant Steps was recently chosen to be the provincial partner for phase two of the Ready, Willing and Able (RWA) initiative in Quebec. Funded by the Government of Canada, RWA is a national initiative designed to increase the labour force participation of people with an intellectual disability or autism. RWA has brought real outcomes and has empowered thousands of job seekers who previously were unable to enter or remain in the competitive labour force while providing employers with a source of talent that was overlooked in the past.



*Giant Steps students, along with their educators, begin the first day of their work placement program at the Provigo grocery store in NDG on October 28.
(Photo, Andre Pereira)*

For over 20 years, Giant Steps students aged 16 and up have participated in work experience programs in industry/community settings, supported by an educator, with the goal to build employment readiness skills, autonomy and community participation. All work placements are chosen based on the students' interests, skills and abilities, while expanding their work repertoire and self-esteem. This year's work-based inclusion opportunities will take place at organizations such as Provigo, Aldo, Moisson Montreal and the Queen Elizabeth Health Complex.

Entering its fifth year, the Giant Steps Adult Program, in collaboration with St. Laurent Adult Education Centre, con-

tinues to provide educational programs to develop the skills that lead to employment, in all its diverse interpretations, and greater independence both at home and in the community.

Finally, the fifth edition of the Autism in Motion Conference will take place at the end of March and will focus exclusively on autism and employment, making the business case for organizations to adopt an autism-inclusive / neurodiverse hiring policy. Keynote speaker Randy Lewis from Walgreens and organizations such as Microsoft, Ernst & Young, Deloitte, Auticon and others will highlight how an inclusive approach has led to better business outcomes for them while pro-

viding urgently needed opportunities to individuals who wish to work and contribute. A roundtable will bring together numerous stakeholders with a vested interest to advance the hiring of people on the autism spectrum.

Ultimately, the aim of these initiatives is to increase the employment preparedness, opportunities and outcomes for autistic individuals. This in turn will lead to a better quality of life, improved health and maximized level of independence.

Nick Katalifos is centre principal at the Wagar Adult Education Centre, chairman of Giant Steps School and Resource Centre, and parent ambassador to TACC.



INSPIRATIONS

Inspirations is produced by the Communications and Marketing Division and the Student Services Department of the **English Montreal School Board** and distributed across the Greater Montreal, Laval-Laurentians and South Shore areas.

Editor

Mike Cohen

Managing Editor and Coordinator of Operations

Wendy Singer

Assistant Managing Editor

Cindy Davis

Layout & Design

Emine Arslan Avci

Consulting Editors

Lew Lewis, Julie Ren  de Cotret

Copy Editors

Manon Bourassa, Elaine Cohen, Kristin McNeill, Randy Pinsky

Sports Editor

Daniel Smajovits

Ottawa Bureau Chief

Jack Silverstone

Special Advisors

Joanne Charron, Nick Katalifos

Advertising & Sponsorship

Cindy Davis, Rikee Gutherz-Madoff

Administration

Carole Gagnon

Phone: 514-483-7200, ext. 7244

Fax: 514-483-7213

E-mail: info@inspirationsnews.com

Website: www.inspirationsnews.com

Facebook: @inspirationsnews

Twitter: @inspirationsmtl

6000 Fielding Ave. Suite 109
Montreal, Quebec H3X 1T4



FROM THE HOUSE

Senator Jim Munson on implementing the Accessible Canada Act

By Jack Silverstone

On March 20, Senator Jim Munson sponsored Bill C-81, the Accessible Canada Act: An Act to Ensure a Barrier-free Canada, with a passionate speech in the Senate. The prominent former Montreal and Ottawa broadcast journalist recalled the birth of his own child with Down syndrome some 50 ago and his passing while still an infant. I had the opportunity to sit down with Senator Munson in Ottawa to discuss the significance of this new legislation.

He described his determination to get the bill passed through the Senate and back to the House of Commons in time for it to get Royal Assent before Parliament rose and not to allow it to get caught up in parlia-

mentary struggles. Not only was that deadline met, but all amendments made in the Upper Chamber were accepted by the government. The bill became law on June 21.

I asked the Senator what he saw as the next steps. He said he expected the federal government to move quickly to set up the Advisory Board mandated in the bill and to get on with the hiring of thousands of Canadians with disabilities. When I asked if he felt that the legislation would have been better with a requirement that there be a progress report to Parliament, he replied: "The report will be to the Canadian people. This legislative initiative was driven by public consultations and consultations with the disability community who will be the guardians of this law."

Senator Munson noted that the disability community tended in the past to operate in "silos," with "small asks." Now, however, they have coalesced into a powerful group demanding basic human rights, equal justice and a level playing field.

He cited as an example the Canadian Autism Spectrum Disorder Association. He said "...now we are dealing with nothing less than a cultural shift in terms of acceptance in the public sector. In the case of people with autism or Asperger's syndrome, while they may be limited in social skills, they must be accepted and appreciated for their intellectual abilities. They are now a force to be reckoned with."

We discussed the recently published new *Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations*, which set service standards for large airlines in Canada. Sena-



Senator Jim Munson in a meeting with two T1D youth (Sierra and Madeline) during JDRF's "Kids for a cure" day. (Photos, Senator Jim Munson's office)

tor Munson opined that it was good to see the nation's airlines being obliged to catch up with passenger rail. He remarked that "...VIA Rail was ahead of the curve, implementing new technology that can guide a blind person through the station and right on to their train. This is a classic example of accessibility."

He also cited the good work of some of the provinces, saying that accessibility is a great place for cooperative federalism and shared practices.

Our discussion took place in his office, which has a picture-perfect view of Parliament Hill. The Hill is something of a construction zone now and will continue to be for the next several years as the aged structures there undergo extensive renovations.

Senator Munson recalled that on a recent overseas trip, he stayed in an architecturally stunning hotel which, for all its beauty, was impossible to navigate for persons with disabilities. He expressed the hope and belief that the renovated Parliament buildings would take the needs of people with disabilities fully into account, suggesting that schools of architecture include accessibility in their curriculum.

Senator Munson wrapped up our discussion with a plea to regard people who heretofore were viewed as disabled and instead heed their call to "...look at my ability."

Jack Silverstone is a lawyer and was chief of staff to the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration from 2005-2006. He is counsel to The Rothwell Group in Ottawa.



Senator Jim Munson speaking at Minister Qualtrough's reception commemorating the successful passing of Bill C-81.



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StopGap: Making Montreal more accessible one ramp at a time

By Cindy Davis

In 2011, Toronto-based Luke Anderson had had enough of not being able to enter places of business that were only a single step off the ground because of his wheelchair. He decided to do something about it. He started approaching business owners to see if he could make their businesses more accessible by building and supplying them with portable wooden ramps, free of charge.

The idea took off, and Anderson created StopGap Foundation, whose mission is to help communities discover the benefit of barrier-free spaces and provide support to create them through their ramps. A couple of years ago, Chris Kennedy took up the cause in Montreal. Inspired by Anderson's work, Kennedy secured funding to expand the project into Montreal and has already built and installed over 50 ramps.

"I'm a quadriplegic myself so, for purely selfish reasons, I like to go to places," laughs Kennedy. "The ramps make my

life a little more accessible, and I think the whole goal is to have a more universally accessible city. Montreal is an old city, and we're not asking that businesses completely redesign a heritage building so that a wheelchair can get inside. If you put a ramp on there, it's a 'stop gap' measure to make things more accessible without making major renovations."

Now, StopGap is branching out and working with schools to help spread their message of accessibility. Kennedy has worked with students from elementary-school age to adults in scoping out businesses that could use ramps, and then building, painting and supplying them, while promoting inclusion to the students. The program is spread out over three visits by Kennedy in the school year, and the response, so far, has been very positive.

"We've been working with more schools and organizations as things slowly 'ramp' up," says Kennedy. "It's all about aware-

ness and normalizing disability, and it just helps create a universal community that is accessible to everyone. It helps for children to communicate with people with disabilities and to let them know that there's nothing to be scared of."

Over the summer, Kennedy worked with students from the Marguerite-Bourgeoys School Board and plans to do more work with them in the future. He also ran the program for a Concordia volunteer program called Community Compass. He is now in talks with a few schools from the English Montreal School Board to build ramps with their students this school year.

To learn more and to see how your school can get involved, visit www.stopgap.ca



Chris Kennedy proudly poses outside a business recently equipped with a StopGap ramp. (Photo, Chris Kennedy)



This is John Grant: The story behind their show

By Steven Atme

It began in October 2018. I was giving a lecture at BCM College, and afterwards, teacher Cari Friedman approached me. She was impressed with what I had shared and proposed that I teach creative arts at John Grant High School, where she also teaches. We reconnected months later to discuss plans for Cari and her committee's talent show project, which they have produced for many years.

I came on board as their Artistic Director/Mentor in late March 2019. The cast was made up of 40 participants, a few of which worked with different committee members while Cari chose six students to work with me, some of them living with disabilities and others with different behaviour challenges.

For two and a half months, I had the pleasure of getting to know everyone, and witness their great talent and wonderful personalities. These students inspired us to come up with the title of the show: *This Is Us*.

Everybody showcased their talents by playing instruments, singing, dancing and reciting French poems. They even demonstrated karate and showed commercials.

Each student chose to showcase their own individual talent. At the end, there was a graduation ceremony, where I sang "Time

to Say Goodbye" in Italian! This talent show was so important for everyone. Expressing emotions, letting feelings out through creative arts helps everyone during their best days and rough patches. I never altered my group's work. I only guided them until they blossomed and shined.



The John Grant talent show team performed on June 12 at Wagar Adult Education Centre. (Photo, Cari Friedman)

There was a time when one of my students was in tears. She didn't want to talk about her problems. I said, "I completely understand and respect your decision. If you don't want to talk about it, why not play the piano and let it out?" The student played her song with soul. At that moment she stopped, got up and gave me a big hug. I whispered, "You did the right thing. I'm very proud of how far you've come to be where you are now. Never stop."

This Is Us was performed on June 12, and was a big success. Seeing our participants shine and having fun, and seeing the change within each person made my heart content. This wasn't just a high school show. This was a beautiful and colourful show that captivated audience members, including the John Grant High School staff. Everyone left the Wagar Adult Education Centre auditorium feeling inspired.

This is John Grant. A high school welcoming everyone from all over with great staff and students. I loved being with these students. They, too, inspired me to continue having fun and live life to the fullest potential. Thank you JGHS!

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.



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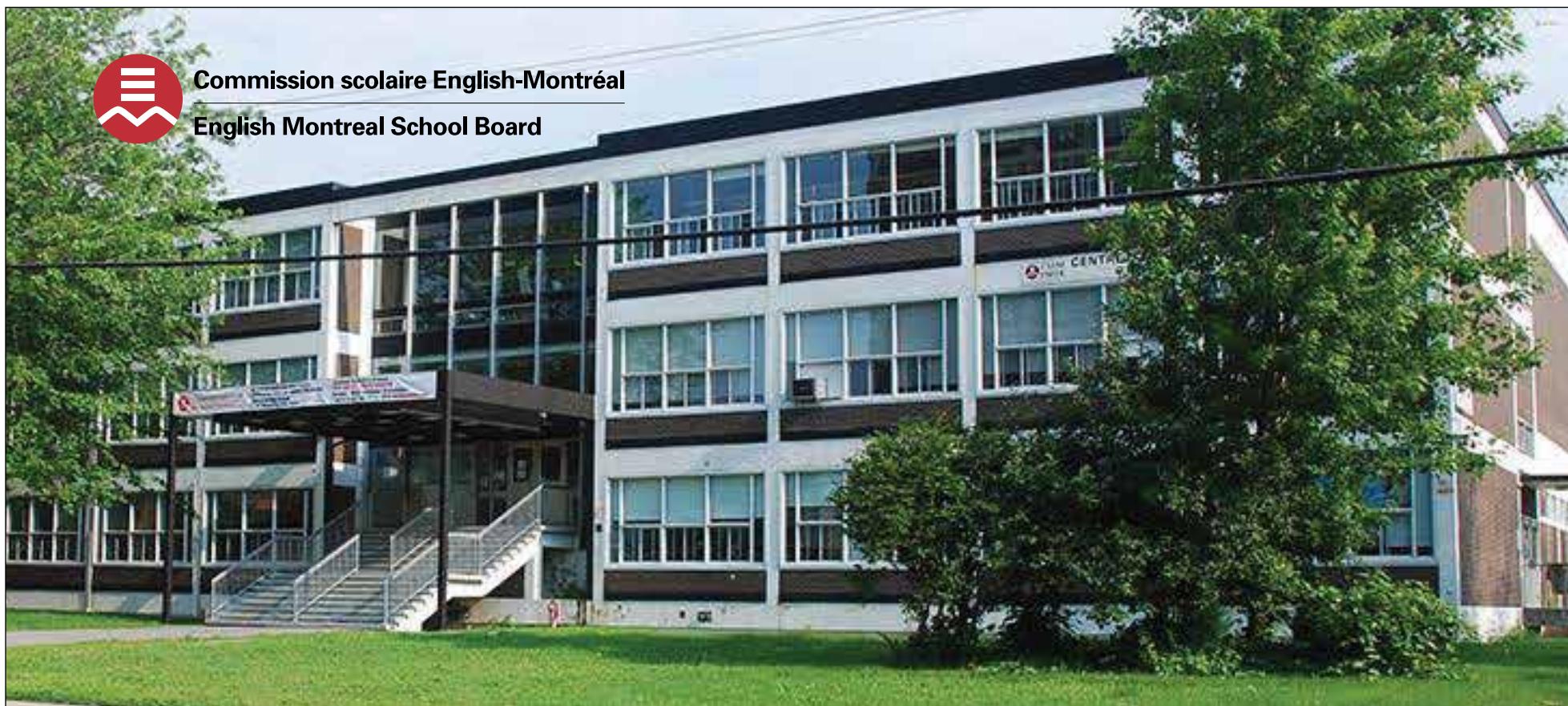


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Nurturing connections fosters positive identity, sense of security

By *Despina Vassiliou and Janet Perlis*

The connections and ties that we make with and for our children create a strong sense of self. Good connections foster a positive identity, a solid sense of security and a feeling of belonging. Weak connections create a sense of insecurity or uncertainty, a negative sense of self and a lack of trust. It is through our relationships with our children that we can build a firm foundation to help them become comfortable with who they are and how they relate to the world around them.

As children develop, they are exposed to a wider range of people, which allows them to learn and grow. As they mature, these relationships extend to their peers and the community they are involved with. These additional relationships may cre-

ate new opportunities for growth and support. However, it is the relationship with their caretakers that remain most important though it may evolve throughout childhood and adolescence to match the child's changing needs.

Here are some strategies to help nurture these important relationships:

► **Find similarities:** Take the time to find something in common with your child, whether it is a television show, a book, a hobby or an activity. Having something to discuss is always a great way to forge a relationship with your child.

► **Listen actively and acknowledge their feelings** by letting them take the lead in conversations and reserving our judgments.

► **Build relationships:**

○ Building and promoting friendships with others: Children live in interdependent worlds that bring the possibility of lots of supportive relationships. As parents, we can provide them with opportunities to socialize and establish relationships with others in our communities (e.g., religious or cultural groups, neighbours or family friends).

○ As a parent, it is impossible not to model. Your children will see your example – positive or negative – as a pattern for how you relate to others and establish friendships.

► **Create a sense of belonging:**

○ Children need to feel they are needed and important. They need people in their lives to make them feel this way, whether it is through learning about their ethnic cul-

ture or following family traditions. This helps them build that sense of belonging to a family and/or community, and build their values.

○ Children need to believe their lives have a purpose and that their families need them. For example, provide them a family contribution that they can do with you, like sorting laundry.

○ Build their sense of culture and values: Children need parents who will help them shape their values and beliefs by exposing them and teaching them about their culture. Children need to know their culture in order to better understand who they are. Culture can mean their ethnicity or family culture.

Keep in mind that children always want connections with their parents, but it looks different at various ages and stages of development. It may not seem like it but they do appreciate the effort their parents make to connect with them.

Dr. Despina Vassiliou and Janet Perlis are school psychologists with the English Montreal School Board and part of its Mental Health Resource Centre.

Self-contained classrooms at St. Raphael help students cope, gain social skills

By *Cindy Davis*

Over 10 years ago, the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) began offering the self-contained classroom model in some of its schools for students requiring additional academic, social or behavioural support. The model offers a small class size with specific support tailored to the needs of the students in the class.

Several schools offer one or two self-contained classrooms, but St. Raphael Ele-

mentary School in the Park Extension area of Montreal is the only elementary school within the EMSB where all classes are self-contained.

The school offers classes from grades 1 through 6 as well as a newly added pre-school class, where each classroom has a full-time teacher and behaviour technician in a class of seven to nine students. Students must be referred to St. Raphael from their home school or by a consultant.



St. Raphael Elementary School teacher Jordana Titane works on an art project with a student. (Photo, Natasha Lavigne-Scanzano)

“The ultimate goal is to reintegrate the student into his or her home school,” says Gail Callender, principal of St. Raphael School. “The academics remain the same as an English core school so they don’t miss out on academics, but our primary goal is to help them develop coping and social skills so that they’ll be able to function eventually in their regular school.”

Students generally stay at St. Raphael for one to two years, but can stay for as many years as needed until they are able to reintegrate, says Callender. “It’s nice for the students to come here and achieve success, because often they’ll come not feeling very successful. They’ve already gone through a difficult time integrating into a regular school, and they’re able to have a fresh start here.”

The school offers many additional services such as pet therapy, music and art therapy, a social skills program, an on-site school social worker, and a transition program that promotes pride and self-acceptance among the students and helps them prepare for their reintegration back into their home school. The school also works with student professionals, and all staff receive the Neufeld training, which, “stresses the importance of attachment-based relationships,” says Callender.

Callender feels that the school offers a family-like atmosphere for the students and staff. “Every morning the students have breakfast together,” she says. “We work with Breakfast Canada, and the children get to sit down and take turns serving and preparing the breakfast. It really allows us to have that sitting-down-together-at-a-meal type family feeling that they may not be experiencing at home.”

Callender says that while the staff do get attached to the students, it is very rewarding to see the children reintegrate into a setting that had been very challenging for them before their experience at St. Raphael.

“Our goal is to give them coping skills and to help them develop self-regulation without always needing an adult to assist them,” she says. “We start off by helping them acquire the skill and then eventually they are able to internalize it, so that when they are faced with situations, whether in school or outside, they are able to cope.”

For information, visit www.straphael.emsb.qc.ca.



Assistive Technology Feature



AT tools augment student's reading, writing and confidence

By Wendy Singer

Coronation Elementary School alumni Aaliyah McIntosh is eloquent, bright and cheerful, but when it came to learning French, she came upon difficulties due to learning disabilities stemming from dyslexia. Her French teacher, Brigitte Boulos, observed that McIntosh could read but not understand or make out the sounds of French written words.

Boulos saw McIntosh's potential and that she had lots to share. She wanted her to succeed in French, which led Boulos to consult with Andrea Prupas, assistive technology (AT) consultant for the English Montreal School Board (EMSB)'s West sector.

At the end of Grade 5, McIntosh received a computer, and in her graduating year at Coronation, she began to use AT tools that helped her read, write and communicate in French. "I've had challenges in the past with reading, writing and speaking," she

said. "I could speak but the speaking had to come from the reading and writing. It was difficult for me to do all of those things."

The tools that McIntosh uses include: Read&Write for Google Chrome, which makes documents, web pages and Google Drive files (including PDFs and ePub files) more accessible with helpful components on the literacy toolbar that include text-to-speech, speech recognition and word prediction; WordQ, an app that includes word prediction, speech feedback, and supports writing and editing, an ExamReader pen that highlights a sentence in a text or book and reads it aloud, allowing students to read books, newspapers, texts and digital workbooks; and Snapverter, a Google tool that converts PDF files into text that is readable in Read&Write.

AT tools have enabled McIntosh to break out of her shell. "I speak into the micro-

phone, and the program writes what I want to say. Before I didn't want to open myself up because I felt like nobody understood the way I was and how I learnt. Once I got my AT tools, I became more open and said to myself, 'I can do this now!'"

Boulos is delighted with her student's progress. "Read&Write has changed Aaliyah as a student. It allowed her to follow in class and add her own thoughts. And the biggest change in her is her level of self-confidence."

McIntosh was graduating from Coronation last spring when *Inspirations* spoke with her. She was planning to continue using her AT tools, and working with Prupas and the resource team at Marymount Academy International in the 2019-2020 school year.

Listen to the Inspirations News Podcast with Boulos and McIntosh to hear more!



French teacher Brigitte Boulos and student Aaliyah McIntosh at Coronation Elementary School made great progress using assistive technology.

Students' voices emerge with TouchChat HD at Hampstead



Classroom teachers Margot Faessler (left) and Adara Ragguette (right) work on TouchChat with student Juliet at Hampstead Elementary School.

Several Hampstead Elementary School students found their voice last school year after using a high-tech augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) software.

The school's Early Stimulation Class (ESC) team used TouchChat, an AAC software, with three Cycle 1 students who had varying diagnoses and communication needs, and each thrived in their own way.

TouchChat HD, a communication software that works with Apple products, is designed for individuals who have difficulty using their natural voice. After training from English Montreal School Board (EMSB) assistive technology consultant Andrea Prupas, the Hampstead team was anxious to try it out.

Student Lashawndel was non-verbal at the beginning of the 2018-19 school year. When he transitioned from a vocabulary board to TouchChat, he started having verbal approximations. For example, if he wanted apple juice, he would touch the matching visual on his iPad, hear the words "apple juice" and repeat them. "He can now say numbers, sing with us, express his wants and needs," said Razan

Khobieh, speech-language pathologist at the EMSB. "It's absolutely amazing the progress he has made." The ESC team noted that Lashawndel was more patient and confident in the classroom.

Lashawndel's parents first witnessed him communicating with the iPad at a parent-teacher interview and were enthused. "Lots of parents are afraid of using an iPad or visuals because they worry their child won't talk. But it's multi-modal. They see the picture of the word, they hear it and then they say it," Khobieh explained.

Lashawndel's father Linton Myers watched as his son continued to use the iPad over the summer. With a strong memory and a love for numbers, this student took to technology early, having used a phone at the age of two. "I'm feeling great about how Lashawndel has taken to assistive technology in the classroom and at home. He understands it well. The iPad helps him to make sentences. It is changing the way he's learning, and he is more independent," shared Myers.

Tyler talks, loves to spell and is hyperlexic (when a child has the ability to read early

....continued on p. 11



Assistive Technology Feature

...continued from p. 10

on) but his speech was not functional. The team customized TouchChat on his iPad with a strengths-based approach by adding word prediction as an option when using text-based communication. This helped him express himself more clearly. His classroom teacher at the time, Margot Faessler, explained that they were able to get into his world to work with him quicker. "He was less frustrated and experienced less behavioural issues and stimming."

Faessler's other student Juliet has language ability, but due to a speech disorder, often seen in individuals with Down syndrome, her speech is unintelligible. "Our goal with Juliet was to have her communicate through the iPad in a clear fashion. Juliet presses her message window to say how she is feeling, either sad, mad, etc. This helps us, and her friends can now understand her," said Faessler.

While the team found TouchChat easy to learn, the challenge comes later while tailoring it to each student's needs as they grow with it into adulthood. "Parents need to be trained as well so they can continue the work after school. To reap the most benefits, AAC communication tools need to be used every day since communication is 24 hours a day, seven days a week," said Prupas.

"TouchChat has allowed our students to find their voice whether it speaks for them totally or supports their voice," added Faessler. "Over the school year, the goals for the students changed. At the beginning, they pointed to things to communicate, not being able to verbalize their thoughts. At the end of the year they were using sentences."

For information about TouchChat HD, visit <https://touchchatapp.com> -W.S.



Classroom teacher Margot Faessler, student Lashawndel, and speech-language pathologist Razan Khobieh work together using TouchChat at Hampstead Elementary School.

Animation software developer unexpectedly opens gateway to communication for people with autism

By Wendy Singer

Paul Nightingale has over 25 years of experience in digital content creation, production and post-production, and technical development in film and television. Originally from London, England, his career took him to California, where he had the opportunity to work with George Lucas. Now residing in Montreal, in 2014 Nightingale founded nawmal, a Windows-based software app that uses high quality text-to-movie 3D animation to quickly create professional-looking animated videos.

Users simply select from a variety of voices or upload a recorded voiceover, and then choose a set and script. Within minutes their characters will perform like actors – moving, talking and interacting with each other.

While his original market was the public at large, over one year ago, Nightingale

started hearing from people with autism who were using nawmal, and reporting that it was helping them communicate. "I'd like to say it was by design, but we've been invited into this. The autism community knocked on the door, and we saw the power of how the software has helped," he said.

Having no previous experience with or knowledge of autism, Nightingale contacted Autism Speaks Canada to validate what he was beginning to see. "We went through an evaluation phase and essentially discovered that for certain people, nawmal is very attractive because it's kind of like a video game, in that it's fun with a very high level of engagement. You're making your characters speak on your behalf, which is ideal for those who are non-verbal," he explained.

Nightingale has connected with Giant Steps School and other Montreal organi-

zations to share the software. Ross White, education technology specialist at Giant Steps School, introduced nawmal to his students in November 2018. He intended to use it to create social stories and training videos, and enhance creativity and self-expression. White describes the software as easy to use, and the variety of characters and settings attractive. "Nawmal is an excellent way to initiate and sustain conversations with students, trading lines back and forth, and getting students to interact and collaborate," shared White.

One of White's students who had very limited verbal output was quickly able to communicate more clearly using nawmal. "Initially his responses were very concrete (sad, tired, bored, it's time for math) but we quickly advanced, and he provided me with information concerning his personal preferences and interests. I showed some of the students' video creations to teachers, and they noticed the students' personalities coming through. This fact alone makes it a very valuable tool," added White.

Nightingale and his team are working with 20 families to document nawmal's many applications. For example, one parent reported that they can resolve problems sooner and are seeing the sense of humour of their child emerge.

Nightingale has shifted the direction of his company to make nawmal even more helpful and accessible to those with autism, reading and writing difficulties or other communication issues. He is in discussions with universities to conduct a research project to measure improved skills over time and knowledge transfer from the virtual to the real world.

To learn more, visit www.nawmal.com



A nawmal character speaks the words of its programmer. (Photo, nawmal)

Huddol.com supports caregivers online

Sometimes you just need a place to vent, to feel supported and to know that there are others out there like you. Huddol.com is a social media platform that was originally launched in 2017 by Mark Stolow, president of the Canadian Caregiver Network, to provide caregivers an online platform to connect with each

other and with experts in the field. The site features specific discussions and groups that focus on various illnesses and conditions, as well as an entire section designated for special needs families to share their thoughts, feelings, and to be put in touch with experts who can answer their questions.

This Montreal-based company's rapid growth demonstrates that technology can play a large part in being a positive connective force for those who might sometimes feel isolated.

For information, visit huddol.com

- Cindy Davis



Assistive technology in the classroom: Rosemount and Lauren Hill students share their experiences

By Cindy Davis

It is clear that assistive technology (AT) has entered the classroom and is being used as a valuable learning aid in many cases. With higher marks generally reported amongst students using these tools, the evidence is that AT is beneficial for students who not only require additional learning support, but it also may have a positive impact on the student population as a whole.

But, how do the students themselves feel about it? We decided to speak to students with individualized education plans (IEP) from two EMSB schools to see how the use of assistive technology has helped them.



Students Cassandra Scoppa and Summer Hawk use WordQ for exams, and iPads with Snapverter and/or Read&Write in the classroom. Here's what they had to say about using AT.

Cassandra Scoppa – Rosemount High School

“I use the iPad for reading comprehension and tests - so that it reads to me - and I find that it helps me a lot. Sometimes when I read, some words are unclear to pronounce, and the iPad reads it much clearer than I would. Plus, you can play it as many times as you want.”

“It helps you not only with memory, but it also helps you if you don't understand a word - it will read it out for you and you could repeat the words in your head or say them out loud and get to know them more.”

“[Using AT] makes me feel confident and gives me that ‘come on, you can do this, you’re good’ feeling. Before, I was bullied because I was one of those kids that needed more help than the others. It helped me overcome. I don’t have to be afraid.”

Summer Hawk – Rosemount High School

“I’ve got a computer, and I use tablets too. I have trouble reading and writing, so the computer helps me with spelling, and it reads to me.”

Summer uses her phone to take photos of class handouts, and then uploads them to her computer. She is then able to have the material read out loud to her.

“It helps me get better grades and understand the material. If it’s going to help you, you should try it. It makes me feel more confident when I have to do a project, and there are a lot of kids in my class that use it too.”

Rosemount High School resource teachers Megan Folkins and Moksha Serrano say that at their school, AT is used more frequently in the younger grades. Many of the younger students are already accustomed to the technology and, in many cases, it can be used as a temporary extra support. “We think of these tools as scaffolds that later on they might not need,” says Folkins. With roughly 25 percent of the school population on an IEP, AT is now being introduced in the older grades as well.



Mattia Pagani – Grade 10 student at Lauren Hill Academy Senior Campus

“(AT) has helped me because last year, before I was using WordQ, I found that I wasn’t doing too well on my tests. I prefer when things are read out loud to me. I went out of class with Ms. Faustini (Resource Teacher) one time to do a test. I used WordQ, and I liked it and I started using it more and more.”

“Before, it would take me a long time to do a test because I would keep having to go over the questions. It would take forever because I wouldn’t understand the questions, and I’d have to wait because the teacher would be with another person. Using WordQ was much easier because I would be able to go back, and I didn’t have to wait for the teacher. I could answer my own questions.”



Jennifer Raposo – Grade 10 student at Lauren Hill Academy Senior Campus

“[AT] helps me if I can’t read something and my teachers are too busy; it makes it easier for me than to bother them.”

Along with WordQ, and other speech-to-text and text-to-speech technologies on computer and tablet, Jennifer uses a device called a C-PEN which looks like a highlighter, but when scanned over text, reads the material out loud to the user.

“I don’t have great reading comprehension when I’m reading myself, so I use this pen when I need it. It has improved my marks a lot.”

“[Using AT] is not for everybody. Everyone has their own skills or ways to learn but I would say that it’s good to try it out, because if you don’t try it out, how would you know if you’re going to like it?”

According to Grade 10 resource teacher Anna Faustini, approximately 200 students of the 900 who attend Lauren Hill Academy Senior Campus use some form of AT. In general, Faustini finds that students using AT are “a lot more independent than before. They take ownership in their learning. They’re really confident in telling me what it is that they need, and what works and what doesn’t work.”



Strategies to implement healthy and balanced screen time

By *Stephanie Paquette*

Technology often plays a daily role in our home, school and work environments. We use technology to accomplish specific tasks, which help us navigate, communicate and be entertained. Screen time for children is a hot topic among researchers, and numerous studies and articles cite the negative impact of screen-based entertainment.

In 2019, a study conducted by the University of Alberta's Faculty of Medicine and Dentistry concluded that preschoolers who were exposed to more screen time showed significantly higher behavioural and attention difficulties at age five. The impact of screen time on behaviour was greater than any other risk factor assessed, including reduced sleep, parental stress and socioeconomic factors.

In my role as a professional who works with children, and as a parent myself, I have witnessed and been called upon to intervene when school children – and my own children – have exhibited negative behaviours when screen time ends. These behaviours have included screaming, crying, rolling around on the floor and displays of physical and verbal aggression.

When I worked in the social service sector, one of the most memorable screen-related outbursts that I witnessed was with a teenager whose mother had turned off his video game and subsequently disconnected the Internet connection. This teenager's relationship to video games was all-consuming, and he had abandoned all other activities in favour of gaming. I later discovered that this teenager had created his entire social network through video game chatting, and that he was isolated in all other spheres of his life. To disconnect with the video game

was to connect with the deep discomfort and loneliness of his social isolation.

When I was able to understand the function of this teenager's explosive behaviour, I was able to start working with the family to alleviate the pain that they were all experiencing. To start this process, the family made a choice to implement screen time in a healthy and balanced way. They did this, and you can too, in the following ways:

- Make rules about screen time. Speak with your children to determine where and when they can use screens and for what purpose. These rules will shift depending upon your child's age.
- Take the opportunity to sit with your child during screen time and talk about what you are watching. This can be effective with younger children and with teenagers. With younger children, you can take an opportunity to pause the show and speak with your child to ensure that they understand and can ask you questions.
- Screens should be used as a tool and not a substitution for real-world interactions. Encourage play and friendships with others. This is where children will develop important social, emotional, communication and problem-solving skills.
- Aim for short screen times and avoid it right before bed because it can impact how quickly your child falls asleep.

When use of technology and screen-based entertainment is conscientiously implemented and modeled by adults, they can be enjoyed by all.

Stephanie Paquette is a behaviour management specialist and Project Harbour coordinator at the English Montreal School Board.

SMART CANE GIVES MOBILITY TO VISUALLY IMPAIRED

New technology is playing an invaluable role in preventing impairments of all types from becoming disabilities. Take the white cane, for example, that until recent years, could only detect obstacles in close range and below the knee.

One such invention is the Smart Cane device, which is placed atop a white cane. When the ultrasonic sensor detects an

obstacle, it buzzes against the palm, and the closer the obstacle is, the stronger the vibrations become. When paired with the WeWALK mobile application via Bluetooth, the user can use applications with WeWALK's touchpad, such as navigation, without holding a phone. The device is integrated with Google Maps and Voice Assistant, and in the future, it will be integrated with transportation and ride share applications.

–*Wendy Singer*

When a flick of an eye gives access to the world

By *Danielle Gravel and Tünde Szabad*

Communicating and playing educational games using a flick of an eye? It sounds like a science fiction movie. Therefore, it is no wonder that our team was sceptical at first when we tried an eye-gaze computer.

For years, our team at Peter Hall School – Danielle Gravel, occupational therapist, Isabelle Simard, physiotherapist, and Tünde Szabad, speech-language pathologist – have been searching for a suitable augmentative technology for a multi-handicapped student, Christian. This student was socially connected to his environment but unable to initiate any reliable voluntary movement with his hands, head or feet but could use his eyes.

The technology we tried is the Tobii integrated eye gaze system, which is a cutting-edge technology. It has high accuracy and precision, is easy to calibrate and is packaged in a rugged exterior, which is suitable for the classroom.

When we began to train with Christian, we showed him what this technology could do for him. It took him only one session to understand that he can use his eyes as a computer mouse. It took us several sessions of practice to work on his physical endurance and eye control. After five months of individual training, our team of

therapists suggested the implementation of the device in the classroom setting. This is where Christian communicates daily how he feels, what he wants to do or what kind of donut he prefers at Tim Hortons thanks to the dedicated support of his teacher, Samia Ouali. It also allows him to be just a regular teenager, with one activity being playing computer games independently.

We then tried the device with other students: Nikko, using a head stylus, discovered another way to activate the computer. Leanna with Rett's syndrome is now capable of playing simple action/reaction games. By 2019, we had a whole class using the Tobii as part of their daily activities.

Our experience with this technology showed that believing in our students' capacity combined with good teamwork makes all the difference. We succeeded in using a cutting-edge technology to enrich our students' lives and to enable them to engage in their environment, to play games like their physically abled peers, to watch videos, to listen to music and maybe, one day, to write an email. So why limit our dreams? Like a famous sci-fi character once said, "To infinity and beyond!"

Danielle Gravel is an occupational therapist, and Tünde Szabad, a physiotherapist at Peter Hall School in Ville St. Laurent.



Students use the Tobii eye gaze system in the classroom at Peter Hall School. (Photo, Peter Hall School)



Assistive Technology Feature

McGill panelists discuss the role of technology for special needs

By *Randy Pinsky*

“Adaptive technologies can be a literal game changer for someone who normally does not have the ability to interact with those around them,” said Dr. Stefanie Blain-Moraes, during McGill University Law Faculty’s roundtable on “Disability and the Individual: Capacity, Communication and Self-Expression” on October 16. Blain-Moraes, professor at McGill’s School of Physical and Occupational Health, was among three panelists discussing the role of technology in empowering individuals with special needs at the event hosted by the Center for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism as part of their 2019-2020 Disability and Human Rights Initiative.

The other panelists were Jean Horvais, professor at UQAM’s Département

d’éducation et formation spécialisées; and Patrick Fougeyrollas, professor and researcher for Université Laval’s Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Rehabilitation and Social Integration. The roundtable was moderated by Sébastien Jodoin, professor at McGill’s Faculty of Law.

While technology can play an empowering role for those with special needs, the speakers cautioned how dependency can also cause barriers to autonomy. This was evocatively demonstrated by wheelchair-bound Fougeyrollas who had to present via Skype due to malfunctions with his adapted car. A group of 20 engaged in discussions about adaptive technologies, learning how - in spite of their potential - only approximately one percent of those in need have access to them.



Sébastien Jodoin, Jean Horvais and Stefanie Blain-Moraes, with Patrick Fougeyrollas brought in via Skype were panelists on October 16. This was a part of McGill University’s Centre for Human Rights and Legal Pluralism’s 2019-2020 Disability and Human Rights Initiative.

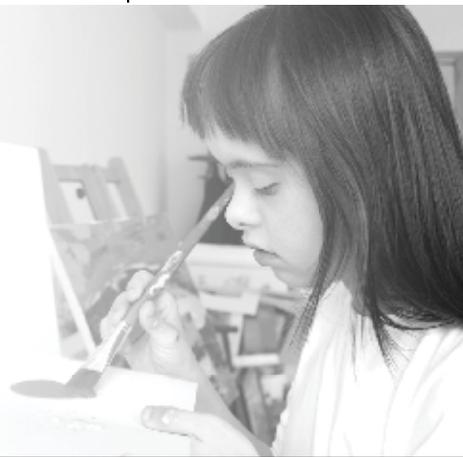
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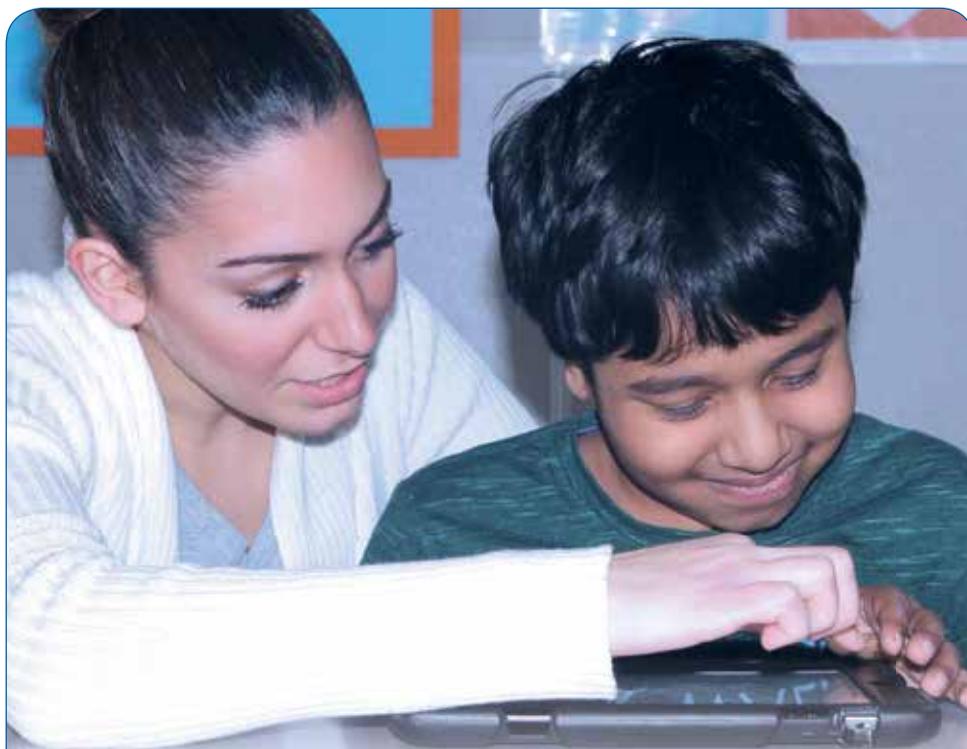


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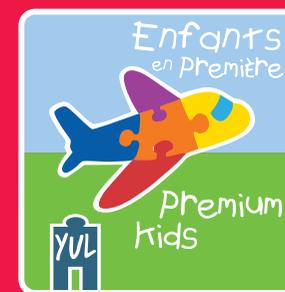
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“Hearing loss? That’s just for old people!” is a common misperception. But did you know that, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), one billion young people aged 12 to 35 will progressively lose their hearing due to unsafe listening practices?

Concerned with the sobering statistics yet inspired that 60 percent of childhood hearing loss is preventable (WHO 2019), HEAR-Entendre (formerly the Communicaid for Hearing Impaired Persons) has launched a sensitization campaign in camps and schools. “The Noise Induced Hearing Loss program officially kicked off in July of 2018,” proudly stated Abby Stonehouse, Program Coordinator, presenting at schools affiliated with the English Montreal School Board.

As the hearing loss domain tends to be senior-focused, the team is working to take into account the new reality of a younger generation constantly accompanied by audio devices. The program is now the first bilingual information initiative on hearing loss in Quebec.

Through interactive activities, HEAR-Entendre engages youth in exploring noise-induced hearing loss; preventive damage caused by prolonged or repeated exposure to loud sounds. Now in their second year, camp visits (made possible by a Canada

HEAR-Entendre sensitizes youth about preventing hearing loss

By Randy Pinsky

Summer Jobs grant) have been immensely popular. Household objects such as pipe cleaners make excellent visual aids for demonstrating the invisible (and altering) dangers of loud noises. Obstacle courses with pool noodles depicting the inner and outer ear are used to familiarize children to the ear’s structure.

The program endorses a harm-reduction model, which advocates awareness about health risks in noisy settings, rather than

stop the activities themselves. As noted by Executive Director Heidy Wager, “Keep going to concerts and enjoying what you normally do - just protect your hearing while doing it!”

Wager herself is an effective ambassador of the program. An avid loud music aficionado and motorcyclist, she easily connects with young adults about her experience. “Actions can be as simple as wearing ear plugs at events or staying far away from



Campers learning about the noise levels of common sounds.
(Photo, HEAR-Entendre)

the speakers,” shared Wager, suggesting easy adaptations with lasting benefits. School presentations are made possible through a partnership with the Hearing Foundation of Canada’s Sound Sense program. While Sound Sense has been active in Canada for over 15 years, this is their first foray into Quebec.

To date, HEAR-Entendre has spoken to almost 2,000 youth, and is looking to add to their presentation tour. It has also recently partnered with Université de Montréal’s audiology department, training students to present in francophone schools.

The team is unique in that most of the animators have hearing loss themselves. As noted by a former program leader, this helps make the situation all the more relatable, “as it gets kids to ask questions they would never ask otherwise.”

Stonehouse reflected, “It’s not just the individual with hearing loss who experiences a change in their lives; it also impacts those around them.” By getting involved, families and colleagues can learn useful behaviour adaptations. This can include facing the person (versus yelling from another room!) and turning off the television when speaking. Stonehouse concluded, “Sensitization and awareness is possible – you just have to start the conversation.”

For more information, visit www.hearhear.org

Creativity and partnership key to successful cortical vision impairment program at Philip E. Layton

By Kristin McNeill

The hallways and classrooms at Philip E. Layton (PEL) School were quiet the last week of August without the sound of children, but a quiet buzz of activity could be felt as staff were busily preparing for their arrival a week later. Among them were special care counsellor Enza Stabile and occupational therapist Hemaxi Patel. Both with the Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre, they met with *Inspirations* August 26 to describe the school’s cortical vision impairment (CVI) project, its growth, accomplishments and goals.

Of the 42 students attending Philip E. Layton school in NDG, 25 have been assessed at the rehabilitation centre’s low visioning clinic as having CVI, an impairment that occurs in the visual centre of the brain. It differs from other visual problems in that it is an impairment in the brain’s information processing centre and not a physical problem associated with the eye.

With CVI, the eye can see but the brain has trouble processing what the eye is seeing, Patel explained. The students’ level of func-

tioning is given a score, which places them between Phases 1 and 3. With this information, and using a specially created grid, teachers and specialists can ensure the right interventions are made. The goal of the CVI project is to increase the child’s visual ability, by developing the skill to focus on an object. Students with a Phase 1 assessment, for example, will work at focussing on one simple, shiny and lit-up object as a starting point. By Phase 2, they may be able to follow, look at and touch the object.

At PEL, the classrooms are designed for groups of five to six students, and six classrooms have CVI aids. Controlling environmental factors is important, said Stabile. Light is reduced if not removed from some classrooms, by turning lights off, drawing blinds or using a black-painted wall. Clutter is removed, and the room is thoughtfully arranged. Teachers often wear dark-coloured clothing, and the level of sound is kept low. The idea is to keep distraction at a minimum so the student stops relying on other senses and focuses solely on the visual sense.

A CVI bin is made up of carefully selected and often specially assembled objects thought up by Patel, Stabile and partnering teachers to stimulate visual acuity. Depending on what phase the child is in, they are exposed to a specific order of toys, books or other objects, which are revealed one at a time. The program has been designed for one-on-one work or group work. The progress can go from looking, then focussing, and for some looking and touching at the same time.

Teaching objects include a shiny bright red heart, a silver glitter ball, a large, fluffy strand of silver tinsel and a red hand bell. Some were used for their bright colour and others could be lit up. Patel and Stabile also said they help make books – in a large-print format with enlarged drawings that they print and bind in-house.

“Children who face multiple impairments can benefit greatly when they succeed in developing their vision to explore their environment,” said Patel.

Described by Stabile as a “huge partnership” between the specialists working at the rehab centre, English Montreal School Board teachers, occupational therapists, child care workers and many others, the “strength in communication” is what has helped grow the CVI program and will keep innovating it.



Hemaxi Patel, left, and Enza Stabile display some of the objects found in a typical cortical vision impairment bin used in classrooms at Philip E. Layton School.



NOTEBOOK



By Wendy Singer

The West Island Association for the Intellectually Handicapped (WIAIH), located in Pointe-Claire, and West Island College (WIC) in Dollard des Ormeaux banded together on May 4 at WIC for their 12th

“The WIC students have a lot on their plates. They do this with grace every year,” said Vaillancourt. “WIAIH participants get so much from interacting with the students. You can see the impact this partnership has with the WIC students. We feel lucky to be a part of this partnership,” shared



WIC students and WIAIH participants celebrate their partnership at their yearly variety show. (Photos, WIAIH)

annual variety show. This year’s show, themed “A Year Together,” partnered 46 WIAIH participants (the largest group to date) with 80 WIC students. This partnership provides WIAIH participants the opportunity to showcase their dancing, singing and acting talents while sensitizing youth to the needs and abilities of people with intellectual disabilities and autism.

Vaillancourt. The show raised nearly \$10,000 for WIAIH. Stay tuned for next year’s show on May 2, 2020.



WIAIH staff Lyne Charlebois, Tamara Vaillancourt, Franca Kesic and Tracy Wrench enjoy the WIAIH variety show.

The variety show is produced by five lead Grade 10 Outreach Program students from WIC. They manage a team of student volunteers who work on the show and hold fundraising events during the year to fund the event. WIAIH’s **Tamara Vaillancourt**, assistant in Volunteer and Community Relations and development agent of the For The Future project, and **Christine McAuley-Brunet**, a volunteer who has taken an active role in the leadership of the show, provide guidance.



WIC student producers of the WIAIH variety show Jaida Shahzada, Skylar Shulkan, Melina Fragapane, Alexandra Sheppard and Léa Lafrance pose for a photo at WIC.

After three years of planning, Habilitas Foundation (formerly the MAB-Mackay, Constance-Lethbridge and Camp Massawippi Foundations), the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton (PEL) Schools and the Lethbridge-Layton-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre (previously MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre) unveiled a brand new Snoezelen room at the Mackay Centre and PEL Schools. On September 10, Habilitas Foundation donors **Merle Wertheimer**, **Christine Babkine** (Montreal Real Estate Foundation for Kids), **Katrin Nakashima**, **Doron Altman**, and **Kristine** and **Richard Daigle** gathered at the school to inaugurate the room. Together, these donors raised over \$75,000 to fund the project. They were joined by the school and rehabilitation centre administrators and staff that were involved in the conception and piloting of the room.

The Snoezelen room provides a multisensory environment that offers an array of

The Mackay satellite class at Westmount High School (Leaders on Wheels) makes and sells delicious spice rubs, barbecue sauces and brownies. On June 5 at the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools, they were proud to present the Montreal Children’s Hospital (MCH) Foundation with a cheque in the amount of \$3,773, which they raised through the sale of their products. The Leaders have donated a total of \$13,536 to the MCH Foundation over the past five years. “We raise money so the hospital can continue to do their good work and take care of all of us,” said **Rose Sondola**, teacher of the Mackay satellite class.

MCH Foundation representatives **Alessia Di Giorgio**, advisor, Special Events and Community Relations; and **Marie-Claude Baribeau**, director, Special Events, were on hand to accept the donation.

Leaders **Philip Paraskevopoulos**, **Mikisew Dube** and **Angelika Phillip** spoke about their class’ fundraising efforts, followed by the showing of a video photo collage and two entertaining videos created by students **Jordan Paquette**, **Abdullah Farooq** and **Harris Qureshi** with the help of **Martin Braunwell**, special care attendant with the class.



Back row: Martin Braunwell, Rose Sondola, Natasha Teixeira Patry, Natalie Mitchell, Bumble, Alessia Di Giorgio, Marie-Claude Baribeau. Front row: Students Abdullah Farooq, Jordan Paquette, Angelika Phillip, Mikisew Dube, and Philip Paraskevopoulos (absent, Harris Qureshi), and on the floor, Caramel, celebrate the fundraising efforts of the Leaders on Wheels at the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools.



Donors Merle Wertheimer, Christine Babkine, Katrin Nakashima, Doron Altman, and Kristine and Richard Daigle at the inauguration of the Mackay Centre and PEL Schools’ Snoezelen room.

interesting and controllable sensory experiences that can relax and calm, stimulate, empower, educate, bring joy, and encourage positive interactions and communication. The Mackay Centre and PEL School’s Snoezelen room was designed with the goal of supporting the child’s therapeutic and

educational goals, and in turn, enhancing their quality of life. Its multi-functionality offers something for all users, whether the child is physically or visually impaired, Deaf or hard-of-hearing, or has language or communication difficulties.



NOTEBOOK

On September 4 at Cégep du Vieux Montréal (CVM), the Center of Research for the Inclusion of People with Disabilities (CRISPESH) launched their *Guide to Assist Parents in the Design and Layout of a Specialized Bedroom for their Children with Autism*. This comprehensive 120-page document that is available on the CRISPESH website was made possible due to a grant from the provincial Ministry of Education and Higher Education. It proposes solutions to enhance the sleep of a child with autism, based on the seven senses. An informative tool, the guide acknowledges that one solution will not fit all children, and presents many options and ideas.



Roch Ducharme, director general, CRISPESH; Audrey Bigras, researcher, CRISPESH; Joseph Darrous, special education technician, Dawson College; Suzanne Pitre, faculty, Interior Design, CVM; Charlotte Leroux, research assistant, CVM; and Tess Perron-Leroux, research assistant, CVM at the sleep guide launch at CVM.

CRISPESH, a partnership between CVM and Dawson College, bridges the gap between research and the community by making their findings readily available and useful. The sleep guide project was an excellent opportunity for CRISPESH to combine its expertise in inclusive design and the sensory needs of children with autism. Collaborators on this study included parents, the Interior Design department of CVM and Dawson's Student AccessAbility Centre. For information on CRISPESH's trainings on sensory aspects of autism and interior design for people with autism, or to consult the sleep guide, visit crispesh.com, search for *Nos projets* and click on "*Améliorer les conditions de sommeil de l'enfant...*"

The Social Tree, founded by **Francesca Dansereau**, hosted a fundraiser at the Comedy Nest on September 19. This young organization is making a difference by improving the quality of life of people with autism throughout their lives, from diagnosis to employment. Supporters in attendance were treated to a variety of quirky, eccentric and relatable comics at Montreal's Comedy Nest. Hosted by **Daniel Carin** of Just for Laughs fame, the headliner **Alingon Mitra** regaled the crowd with comments on families, dating and the challenge of staying on top of laundry. Mitra has been named one of the "New Faces of Comedy" at Montreal's Just for Laughs Festival.

The Social Tree hosted its second annual conference, "Working through the diagnosis" on November 6 at the McGill Faculty Club. Speakers included psychiatrist **Dr. Mark Zoccolillo** from the Montreal Children's Hospital; **Nick Katalifos**, prin-

incipal at Wager Adult Education Center; **Perl Greenfeld**, clinical director of Blocks Therapy; and **Stephanie Swinburne**, occupational therapist and owner of Kiddo Active Therapy. - **Randy Pinsky**



Amanda Paliotti, Social Tree volunteer; Francesca Dansereau, founder; and Hélène Paris, second director of the Social Tree at its fundraiser at the Comedy Nest.



We are fortunate to have **Mark Bergman**, host of The Beat 92.5's Weekend Breakfast show, join the *Inspirations* team as creator and host of the new *Inspirations* News Podcast. Bergman has worked for over 20 years in the radio industry and brings a wealth of expertise with him.

The podcast brings a new dimension to our stories; sharing insights beyond the written word as Bergman peels back the layers with each of our guests. He does this with warmth, curiosity and sensitivity. Tune in and follow us on Soundcloud, Apple Podcasts and Google Play, and search for *Inspirations* News Podcast.

Mark Bergman interviews world-renowned special educator Rick Lavoie on May 31 before a day-long seminar at Ruby Foo's Hotel.



On September 24, the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts (MMFA) celebrated 20 years of its "Sharing the Museum" program. Since launching in 1999, it has enabled over 275,000 vulnerable people to enjoy a broad range of free arts activities created just for them. Thanks to Bell's renewed support through a major donation of \$1 million over five years, even more people who often have difficulty accessing cultural experiences, such as those with physical or intellectual disabilities, or those with cognitive impairments, can enjoy the benefits of art.

Sharing the Museum is the result of expertise-sharing between the MMFA's teams and over 600 non-profit organizations, CLSCs and hospitals. It has become an international model for museum initiatives in accessibility and inclusion, embodying the MMFA's vision of a museum that is open and accessible to everyone, including people marginalized due to social, economic or health factors, and their family and caregivers.

The 3rd International Congress on Whole Person Care took place at McGill University's New Residence Hall from October 17 to 20. While the congress, themed "Exploring Compassion, Addiction, and Culture Change," was medical in orientation, it examined topics that were relevant to anyone in a caregiving role and working to enhance the quality of life of clients, patients or loved ones, and ensuring their own health and well-being while providing care.

Retired physician, author and internationally respected speaker **Dr. Gabor Maté** addressed attendees on October 18 with a presentation and interactive workshop that addressed a range of interconnected topics, from the relationship of stress and illness, the connection between biology and psychosocial components, to learning the



Analté Rodriguez, counsellor, Centre Génération Emploi; Gennaro Stabile, counsellor, Centre Génération Emploi; Nathalie Bondil, director general and chief curator, MMFA; Serine Bentaya, participant in The Art of Inclusion Project; Martine Turcotte, vice chair Québec, Bell; Michel de la Chenelière, chair of the Board of Trustees, MMFA; Christiane Gagné, Jewish General Hospital; Line Riendeau, Allan Memorial Institute; and Danielle Champagne, director, MMFA Foundation at the MMFA's Share the Museum 20th anniversary celebration. (Photo, Pierre Longtin)

The museum offers many free activities, such as The Art of Being Unique Program, an employability program that fosters the discovery of art in partnership with Les Petits Rois Foundation, Miriam Home and Services, Autisme sans limites, Gold Centre and Irénée-Lussier School.

importance of self-care and stress regulation. Specializing in family practice and palliative care, Maté worked for over a decade in Vancouver's downtown East Side with patients challenged with drug addiction and mental illness, and is an expert on the topics of addiction, trauma, childhood development and the relationship of stress and illness.

Led by **Dr. Tom Hutchinson** and his team, the conference included a multitude of lectures that informed on self-care, compassion, self-compassion and mindfulness. Hutchinson is a professor in the Department of Medicine and director of Programs in Whole Person Care at McGill University.



Dr. Tom Hutchinson and Dr. Gabor Maté at the 3rd International Congress on Whole Person Care at McGill University's New Residence Hall.



Pareil pas pareil, j'y vais event brings Laval students together

By Valentina Basilicata



Melanie Gouveia and students have fun getting to know each other at École Jean-Piaget on May 14. (Photo, Anna D'Errico)

Twelve-year-old Luca Pietracupa will tell you he's learned a lot in private elementary school and that he's logged too many hours of homework to count. Yet on May 14, Luca and his sixth grade classmates from École Charles-Perrault in Laval spent a day at École Jean-Piaget of the Commission scolaire de Laval learning a life lesson not found in any textbook: acceptance of others no matter what their abilities.

École Jean-Piaget in Sainte-Rose teaches 116 individuals with disabilities aged four to 21 requiring an adapted and specialized environment. It serves Laval, the Laurentians and Lanaudière regions.

Students from the two schools came together thanks to *Pareil pas pareil, j'y vais* – a yearly event that has been organized by parent volunteers from École Charles-Perrault for over a decade. In previous years, students traveled to other special needs schools, including École Victor-Doré and École Gadbois in Montreal. No matter the location, Charles Perrault principal Jean-Marc Laspeyres stressed the goal of the initiative remains the same: to teach tolerance and respect. “We want our students to realize there are kids who are different, but despite their various challenges, they have the same tastes, the same desires, as anyone else,” he added.

During the visit to Jean-Piaget, 48 Charles-Perrault graduating students buddied up with 39 Jean-Piaget special needs students

to collaborate in four activities throughout the day, including bingo (with candy prizes!), a mosaic art project, a treasure hunt and parachute games. Students also exchanged handmade gifts, gathering for an afternoon assembly to sing, in unison, a rehearsed song, Marie-Mai's “*Différents*,” before saying goodbye to their new pals.

Luca's mom, Melanie Gouveia, organized the day with support from other parent volunteers from Charles-Perrault. Gouveia secured a \$3,000 donation from Caisse Desjardins des Grands Boulevards to cover the costs including transportation, catered lunches, custom t-shirts, loot bags and more.

“They're friends, and they're exactly like us. I had fun,” said Luca. “At first I was nervous about coming because I didn't know how it was [going to be], but once I got to know the [kids] I wasn't stressed at all.”

Jean-Piaget principal, Katy Fortin, explained that activities like this one promote social inclusion, something valuable for her students. “It's important they realize they have the right to these beautiful experiences and that they can do the same things as children without handicaps. It's a rewarding and positive experience for them to have their differences accepted,” she said. Fortin hopes they can be the host school for *Pareil pas pareil* again in the coming years.

Though Charles-Perrault teachers prepare their students in advance for the excursion, many are usually jittery upon arrival.

Maddie perseveres in reading despite dyslexia, and educates others

By Laura Caprini

Meet Madeleine, a Grade 4 student at Dorset Elementary School of the Lester B. Pearson School Board. Last year, Madeleine, or as her friends call her, Maddie, was diagnosed with dyslexia.

Every Saturday morning for over two years, while other kids are sleeping in or on their way to various weekend activities, Maddie makes the trip to Hudson Literacy Clinic to work with teacher Rebecca Chisholm.

“Maddie has been following an intensive multisensory program based on the Orton-Gillingham approach,” explained Chisholm. “She is becoming a more competent reader as a result and has set many goals for herself.”

“I just love reading and writing,” commented Maddie with a grin from ear to ear; a simple statement that speaks volumes.

Having experienced the success as well as the struggles, Maddie set another important goal: She wanted to share her message about learning challenges by making a presentation for her peers. Maddie's mom Wendy was just as excited as she was: “It's a wonderful reinforcement for Maddie to know that her gift of dyslexia is providing her with opportunities to help and educate others,” she said.

The road has not been an easy one for this determined little girl. Despite the challenges, Maddie continues to move forward, her perseverance and tenacity propelling her onwards towards her academic goals. “Maddie is an inspiration and my hero,” said her father Bernie about his nine-year-old daughter. Maddie describes herself as no different than anyone else. “No matter what, dyslexia does not define me. I am who I am!”

Family support is key to any child's success, and Maddie's family has made

“They walk in and are a little standoffish. It's a bit shocking for some when they see these special needs kids. Some might have a wheelchair or they may sign to communicate,” said Gouveia. “But at the end of the day they're giving each other high fives, they're helping



Maddie enjoys reading books at the Hudson Literacy Clinic.

that commitment. In fact, when grandpa and grandma are in town, they make it a point to come out to the clinic for updates and to see Maddie in action.

On May 13, Maddie stood proudly and confidently in front of her classmates and teachers to present a short PowerPoint presentation about dyslexia. In easy-to-understand terms appropriate for her peers, she explained what dyslexia is and how the brain of a dyslexic individual learns to read. To conclude her presentation, Maddie handed out informative brochures she created herself. Maddie's teacher Christiane Laframboise commented that “Maddie was keen to do her presentation and wanted people to understand dyslexia better. The students were impressed.”

Public speaking is not easy for the average adult, much less for a child. Imagine the courage it takes to make a presentation of this nature in front of peers? This child is an inspiration to all who know her. Let it be a message to others that anything can be accomplished when we are determined and committed. Maddie's father made the point that such an endeavour is “incredibly thoughtful and mature for a nine-year-old.”

each other, and they've made a friend. There are no words for how touching it is.”

Valentina Basilicata is a professional wordsmith with over 15 years of experience as a communications specialist and freelance journalist/editor.



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Son's autism an incentive for activist to create supportive solutions

Noting Kelly Bron Johnson's career and community accomplishments, one may mistakenly assume the Montreal activist experienced a hurdle-free youth. True, Johnson excelled academically but she encountered difficulties interacting socially, remained aloof and was bullied by peers. It was only at age 32 that Johnson was diagnosed with autism.

"My eldest son's symptoms differed from mine, but I recognized similarities and sought help for him early on," she said. Married 17 years, Johnson and her husband have two sons, a nine-year-old and a preschooler.

Johnson is the founder of Completely Inclusive (Complètement Inclusif), a company specializing in training businesses how to accommodate people with disabilities. She offers incentives, such as busi-

ness training and a certification program. Recently, she organized a Completely Inclusive and Accessible Networking and Employment event for the public. "I will go into a workplace and do an accessibility audit," she said, pointing out concerns range from wheelchair access to bathrooms located on the same floor, to enlightening



Kelly Bron Johnson (first row standing, third from the right) and participants celebrate Disability Employment Awareness Month at the Completely Inclusive and Accessible Networking and Employment event at Promo 21 Print Shop on October 16. (Photo, Andreas Koustas)

By Elaine Cohen

businesses on the benefits of accommodating people with disabilities. "Most common accessibility changes cost under \$500, and government subsidies are available to fund them. These improvements can make a huge difference in a person's life."

Johnson's entrepreneurial bent dates back to her student years at Concordia University, where she attained a degree in Linguistics. By the time she graduated, Johnson had generated a steady clientele teaching English as a Second Language. Raised in English and French, she also studied German. This past January, Johnson pursued studies in American Sign Language (ASL) at the Mackay Centre and has successfully completed Level 102. Johnson's personal hearing loss prompted her to ensure she had alternate methods to communicate.

An active member of Autism Canada (AC), Johnson is on the board of directors and serves as co-chair of the Autism Spectrum Disorder Advisory Committee. A non-profit,

national organization, AC encourages people to "see the spectrum differently" and reaches out to local groups and individuals throughout the country.

"Autism Canada has a website directory that lists programs and services for autistic people across the country, such as adaptive sports," she said.

When the federal government started making cuts to the Disability Tax Credit, Johnson and AC joined other disability groups, including Diabetes Canada and MS Canada to lobby the federal government. When Johnson returned home, she told her son why she went. "I explained that his disability status will expire when he is 18, and he will have to reapply. I told him I didn't want him to have to struggle finding work."

When her son heard the news, he suggested a pro-active approach. "Well, you have 10 years to fix things," he said, serving as the catalyst behind Completely Inclusive.

For information on Completely Inclusive, phone 438-788-3572 or visit www.compinclus.ca. To reach AC, visit www.autismcanada.org

Celebrating 35 years of Summit School's job training program

For parents of young adults with special needs, the excitement at high school graduation is often accompanied by concern: Is higher education a realistic option? Are there enough social activities available? Will they mope around the house looking for things to do?

Summit School's Job Training and Integration Program was created to respond to the very real lack of opportunities for personal and professional development following high school. Through internships, young adults with intellectual or developmental disabilities can contribute in a meaningful manner, as well as challenge assumptions about special needs.

And the options are no longer merely delivering mail or stocking shelves. Summit's team is committed to finding a variety of venues as well as adapting to the reality of online communications, which have rendered many traditional options obsolete. Partner companies include Canadian Tire, Warner Brothers Games, restaurants, department stores, and McGill and Concordia universities.

As noted by the program's director Lone Bordo, the job training initiative started in 1985 to respond to limited post-graduation options. With an awareness of the alarmingly

high unemployment rate for young adults with disabilities, the team was determined to give them a "fighting chance to be productive members of society."

Placements are based on an assessment of each student's interests, abilities and limitations, for example, matching detail-oriented individuals with clerical posts, and more active people in restaurants or stores.

Job coaches then accompany the intern to work, setting up a routine and ensuring that the needs and interests of all stakeholders are met.

Once any needed adaptations have been arranged, the coach fades out. To further assist in fostering intern independence, Summit has developed visual aids and resource templates to facilitate tasks.

The number of partner companies has vastly grown since the program's launch 35 years ago, mostly through referrals, impressed with the interns' work. "They just want the opportunity to show what they can do," emphasized Bordo. As proudly noted by one Chef on Call stagiaire, "I get each part done and then am ready for the next task."



Intern Athiban Kandasamy (middle) posing with his team at Warner Brothers Games Montréal on May 1. (Photo, Summit School)

By Randy Pinsky

This sentiment was echoed by a manager at Bar B Barn who enthused, "You show him once, and it's done right every time."

After completing their internship, students can obtain a certificate from the Quebec Ministry of Education through its Work-Oriented Training Path.

While internships generally last three months, they can lead to possible employment offers, explained Bordo. A graduate from Summit even recently celebrated his 10th anniversary working for the Bessner Gallay Kreisman accounting firm. TECC Flora also started off as a Summit School curriculum-based program, and has since become a professional flower arrangement business.

Bordo concluded, "We just want our students to be successful and happy." Upon graduation, Summit staff are proud to know their students are now well-equipped for a fulfilling future of options.

Are you a company seeking an intern? Contact Program Director Lone Bordo at lbordo@summit-school.com to learn how you can get involved.



Pathways in ASD study seeks to improve the future of Canadians with autism

By *Valentina Basilicata*

The Autism Speaks Canada website lists important facts and figures about autism: approximately 1 in 66 children are affected; boys are four times more likely to be diagnosed than girls; and an estimated one-third of people with autism remain nonverbal. Yet parents of special needs children – like Natalie, whose 16-year-old son Vince was diagnosed with autism in 2005 – are still left with many unanswered questions about how their kids will grow and develop, and what they can do to improve their future.

The Pathways in ASD study, launched across Canada in 2005, aims to give families like Natalie's those answers. Funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and various partners (Sinneave Family Foundation, Mayberry Family Fund, Kids Brain Health Network, and Autism Speaks Canada) the study initially recruited 424 children with autism for one of the world's largest and longest running longitudinal studies looking at the long-term development of kids and teens with autism.

Vince joined the study in Montreal in 2005, when he was a toddler.

"What we were aiming to do is to figure out what factors are associated with different

types of outcomes for children who have this diagnosis. Before this study was initiated, we didn't really have any data about how kids turn out on the spectrum," explained neuropsychologist Julie Scolah, senior clinical lead for the Pathways study in Montreal and associate director of the Azrieli Centre for Autism Research.

"It was very clear to me we needed to participate so we can all have a better understanding of the condition and see what we could learn, which would hopefully lead to better outcomes for future families," said Natalie, adding researchers have been open to parent feedback throughout the research process. "You want to make change that makes sense and to do that [researchers need] the lived experience of the people. It was great that they listened to us; they took what we said seriously."

Now in its third phase, the study is still tracking data from the same families at its centres in Halifax, Montreal, Hamilton, Edmonton and Vancouver through regular psychological assessments, interviews and parent questionnaires.

"We have fantastic families who have been very dedicated and committed to this study that we owe an enormous debt to for giving



The Pathways in ASD study research team presents their findings at Wagar Adult Education Centre on May 5 as part of the Autism Festival. They are seen here with representatives from Wagar Adult Education Centre, Giant Steps School, and the Transforming Autism Care Consortium.

us so much of their time over the years," said Scolah.

Phase I began in 2005 and looked at development from the time of the diagnosis until the transition to school. Phase II monitored development from age seven to 11, focusing on academics, mental health issues, behavioural adaptation, school services, parental stress and family functioning. Researchers entered the current Phase III in 2015, expected to last about seven years, thanks to further funding from the Canadian Institutes of Health Research. During this period, the focus is on the participants' teen years, what makes them autonomous, whether they enter the workforce or continue post-secondary education.

Once analyzed, the data from each life stage can paint a clearer picture for parents, medical professionals, service providers and policy makers about how to best help those on the spectrum, according to Scolah. Some of the initial findings from the first phase of the study have already been presented to different levels of government.

"The ultimate goal is to take all this information and say to policy makers, 'These are the things we want the government to invest in.' That is what we are ultimately trying to figure out: what are those things that mean that some kids do better than other kids, and can we put money into those things to make sure as many kids as possible do the best that they can?"

The Centre of Excellence for ASD services Quebec's English school boards

By *Jade Lawsane*

In 2003, the Ministère de l'Éducation et de l'Enseignement supérieur designated Lester B. Pearson School Board as the Centre for Excellence for Autism Spectrum Disorder (COE-ASD). Its mandate is to foster and promote inclusive education and best practices for students with an autism spectrum disorder. The Centre of Excellence team is comprised of professionals from many different disciplines including education, psycho-education, psychology and speech and language.

Each year, the COE-ASD provides professional development and consultation for all nine English school boards across Quebec, as well as to the Cree School Board and the Kativik School Board. During the 2018-2019 school year, over 50 workshops

were provided to classroom teachers, para-professionals and administrators. The COE-ASD team is also represented on numerous provincial committees to provide expertise and recommendations pertaining to best practices for students with autism. The team has also worked very hard to establish collaborative partnerships with government agencies, as well as with community organizations that provide service and support to families of children who have autism.

A newsletter providing practical, hands-on strategies and resources to school personnel is distributed three times per year and can be accessed online. In addition, the COE-ASD team maintains a professional library and website. It is also regularly involved in research initiatives in partnership with local hospitals and

university centres, most recently collaborating on a project examining executive functioning among students with autism. For the current school year, the COE-ASD, in partnership with Special Olympics Quebec, was awarded a grant from Autism Speaks Canada to establish inclusive basketball teams in several Lester B. Pearson high schools. Each school team will be comprised of an equal number of players with and without a diagnosis of autism. These "unified sports teams" will train and compete together throughout the school year.

The COE-ASD is extremely proud to be hosting a major conference in April 2020 with Dr. Amy Laurent, developmental psychologist and licensed pediatric occupational therapist. The topic of her presentation is "Addressing Emotional Regulation

in Children and Adolescents with Autism Spectrum Disorder." This full-day workshop, which will take place at the Holiday Inn Pointe-Claire, promises to provide valuable insight and strategies for professionals, educators and parents.

For information about the Centre of Excellence for Autism Spectrum Disorder, please visit <http://coeasd.lbpsb.qc.ca/centre.htm>. Requests for professional development can be made through Patty Cloran, co-coordinator of the ASD Team at pcloran@lbpsb.qc.ca. To register for the conference, visit <http://coeasd.lbpsb.qc.ca/>

Jade Lawsane is a consultant for autism at the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

'Be yourself:' An autism success story

By Tania Piperni

Anthony Campoli enters a room with the presence of a confident adult. At 21 years old, he is an eloquent speaker who fidgets at times and doesn't always maintain eye contact. He is a polite, gentle soul. He attended three schools within the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), including Pierre de Coubertin Elementary School, John Paul I Junior High School, and Laurier MacDonald High School, where he graduated in 2015. Campoli then attended Champlain Regional College to pursue a degree in digital arts and new media and is now studying film animation at Concordia University. His career plan is to pursue sound design for film, television and video games, a big industry in Montreal.

Campoli knows what he wants and how to get it, and is very comfortable sharing his experience with autism. When he was about nine or 10 years old, his parents told him he had "something called autism." At the time, he understood it was "something that makes it difficult to communicate with people and understand gestures." And with that information, off he went to keep on being just a regular kid. Outgoing and social, he was nevertheless aware of some of his "weird things" like pacing, self-talk and manoeuvring when around loud noises. Over the years, Campoli has learned how to turn them into coping strat-

egies. For example, his self-talk now helps reduce his anxiety in his daily life. He prefers smaller groups, quieter spaces and soft-spoken speakers. An important element was the support from his family, which allowed him to better understand casual conversation and adapt to social situations as he was always included in family gatherings.

Success at school, a career in film

Campoli experienced some bullying at school, but he had supportive peers who helped him throughout high school. Lunch clubs provided him with a safe and less stimulating environment, where he could have fun with friends. His teachers and attendants helped him with classroom accommodations, for example adapted exams and extra time to complete work and tests. For Campoli, it was more than just getting extra help. It was building the relationships so that he was comfortable asking for help.

At Champlain College, things continued to improve. Campoli met talented peers who shared his interests. His work and efforts were appreciated. He no longer needed accommodations or support. He adapted well and was able to focus because the work was so interesting. "Learn what you want to learn – that is where you will be the most efficient," he explains. At Concordia, however, he did ask for accommodations and found that helpful. He attended Spectrum



Anthony Campoli at last year's annual fundraising gala for Spectrum Productions.
(Photo, Karam in the World)

Productions (a non-profit video camp and resource in Montreal), now his place of work for the past four years.

Being upfront

Campoli doesn't always find it necessary to tell others about having autism, but when he does share it, he sees it as a great opportunity for people to understand what autism means and how obstacles can be overcome.

"I could have let it affect me as much as I wanted. I am lucky I can voice my opinion and have a head that can understand what I have so that I can make choices and be an advocate."

Advice to others with autism

- Watch videos to learn social cues, how to have a conversation and learn other social skills. Do it until it becomes second nature, based on your needs.

- Ask for accommodations; there are people to help you.
- Be yourself, don't try to be anyone else. "Autistics are the best. They are unorthodox, weird kids that the world needs."
- Hang out with other people on the spectrum because they can better relate to each other. The humour is easier and expectations are lower (Campoli finds neurotypical people more difficult to keep up with).

Anthony's advice to those working with students on the spectrum

- Don't baby the students. Have a conversation with them in a natural, age-appropriate tone.
- Learn the special interests of the students. Use that knowledge to learn something crucial about them.
- Have hybrid classes where students with autism have their own class but can also attend classes with neurotypical students.
- "Autism is just something a doctor told me. It is not the same for everyone since autism is unlike other conditions," says Campoli. "But everyone can do something even if there is a struggle." He feels that people are more open now and that the conversation is changing in society. His advice: "To be on the spectrum shouldn't be an issue." *Agreed!*

Tania Piperni, M.Ed, is an Autism Spectrum Disorder consultant at the English Montreal School Board.

Some hot sauce with your burger? On September 17, local restaurant favourite Chef on Call, welcomed 10 guests from the Regroupement Pour la Trisomie 21 (RT21) for an exclusive visit to their kitchen. The group of young adults with Down syndrome (DS) were very excited to go on such an outing, the likes of which are key for fostering independence and autonomy.

Chef on Call is known for supporting various causes – one monthly "donator" burger at a time – with RT21 being the most recent organizational recipient. *Inspirations'* very own custom-made burger was a huge hit last year!

The restaurant's first burger was flipped in 2009 as the brainchild of a group of starving university students who could never find a satisfying take-out meal. From making homey and filling meals in a tiny apartment kitchen to recently opening a second loca-

Burgers and buddies: Chef on Call hosts young adults from RT21

By Randy Pinsky

tion in Waterloo, Ontario, Chef on Call has always been very involved in the community. One of the most powerful testimonies of this is their partnership with Summit School, regularly providing internships for young adults with intellectual or developmental delays-with great results!



RT21 participants enjoy learning how the kitchen works at Chef on Call on September 17.

As noted by Irwin Kauffman, head manager, "One of our Summit interns was actually able to move out on her own because of working here; her parents are over the moon at her new independence and self-confidence."

Much like the humble beginnings of Chef on Call, RT21 was started by parents around a kitchen table 33 years ago, exchanging information and insights about having a child with DS. This was particularly the case for young adults with DS, for whom there was a concerning lack of resources. Through a variety of talks and fundraisers, RT21 provides families with resources and a support network, as well as social activities for neurodiverse young adults.

A good time was had by all as the group was introduced to the ins and outs of the kitchen, met the friendly Chef on Call staff, and got to season and prepare their own chicken tenders. Burgers were dressed, laughs were shared, and a surprise treat of homemade poutine topped off an already great outing.

For information about RT21, visit <https://trisomie.qc.ca> and Chef on Call, chefoncalldelivery.com



Differently-abled dolls and action figures making headway into toy industry

By Fay Schipper

Playing with toys is known to be an important part of a child's growth, development and understanding of their world. Until recently, differently-abled dolls and action figures have been greatly under-represented in the world of toys. However, more and more dolls are now reflecting the diversity of the children that play with them. There are now approximately 45 to 60 comic book characters and action figures that have a disability.

Children learn early on about self-image, in part from the toys available to them. If toys are consistently able-bodied, it changes the way children think and perceive their world, and highlights differences. When dolls are designed as differently-abled, it provides a great opportunity for children to identify with their toys. When children who walk with white canes, use wheelchairs or wear hearing aids see themselves represented in toys, it can be very meaningful. And in turn, children who are able-bodied learn to understand and accept differences.

This breaking down of barriers could diminish stares from people who are different from each other and pave the road to new friendships. In addition, health care professionals (psychologists, physiotherapists and occupational therapists) welcome diverse toys into their practices, employing them as therapeutic tools.

Diverse dolls are not jumping off the shelves of big-box stores, but if you wear your Sherlock Holmes deerstalker hat, you may be surprised at what you can find here in Canada, with two Canadian companies selling dolls with disabled accessories.

Toys "R" Us Canada sells accessories for Barbie dolls such as wheelchairs. What is interesting to note is that the wheelchair rolls, has working brakes and comes with a ramp so that Barbie can roll in and out of the Barbie Dreamhouse.

For information, visit www.toysrus.ca and search for "wheelchair."



A girl enjoys playing with her Barbie with diverse needs. (Photo, Toys "R" Us)

Flaghouse sells accessories that accommodate Just Like Me Dolls and includes forearm crutches, leg braces, a walker, a seeing eye dog and cane, dark vinyl glasses and a hearing aid.

Their accessories are each sold separately. Visit www.flaghouse.ca and search for "just like me doll accessories."

At the time of writing this article, Etsy (an e-commerce website focused on handmade and vintage items) had 59 disability dolls for sale (www.etsy.com).

For information about diverse action figures, visit www.comicvine.gamespot.com/profile/rawhidekid/lists/characters-with-disabilities/33278/ and www.cbr.com/more-than-able-15-disabled-superheroes-who-inspire-us/ for a listing of these action figures. Many of these figures can be purchased on Amazon.ca.

The website Toyslikeme.org provides a wealth of information on differently-abled toys, why representation matters and where to find representative toys. There is a great need for this field to grow, so that disabled children in the process of developing know that they are not all alone, so that able-bodied children learn to embrace differences, and so that health care professionals have adequate and appropriate tools at their disposal.

Fay Schipper is the volunteer database coordinator for Inspirations.

Transition to kindergarten: A 16-month process

By Victoria Della Cioppa and Candice Madden

A successful early school transition refers to the mutual regulation of practices between daycare service providers, schools, families and the community to ensure a continuity of services, thus promoting the child's early school success. This definition is particularly relevant for children with special needs who experience more difficulties with the transition to kindergarten when compared to their typically developing peers. School readiness is only one part of the solution, as the problem may stem from a lack of good quality relationships between family, school, and community, which work together to support the child.

Research demonstrates that when the first transition is lived in a harmonious way, it will serve as a base for future transitions. It will also have an impact on the child's motivation and commitment to school and, by extension, on both academic perseverance and educational success.

The Ministry of Education suggests that the transition to kindergarten is a 16-month process, beginning in August one year prior to the start of kindergarten and continuing through to November of the kindergarten year. A distinction is made between school readiness – which is the global development of the child's abilities, for example language and cognitive skills upon entrance to school – and the

transition to kindergarten, which encompasses the collaboration of different social spheres during this period. The latter must be conceptualized in terms of the relationships between the family, school and community. These relationships serve as protective factors against children's adjustment problems. For example, when parents feel supported by the school, they may be willing to disclose information about the child's needs, which may in turn prepare the school to support the child. Further, the relationships between daycare and school settings can foster both the early identification of challenges and potential strategies to accompany the child and family into the kindergarten year.

The quality of links between family, school and community (i.e. community organizations and the early childhood health and educational services network), should be considered an outcome of a successful early school transition, rather than an antecedent. This framework may be especially relevant in supporting families who have children with special needs. Together, we can ensure that all students feel welcomed into their school community.

Victoria Della Cioppa is the Healthy and Safe Schools consultant, and Candice Madden is the Kindergarten Transition consultant at the English Montreal School Board.

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Legs du fondateur de L'Arche Jean Vanier aux personnes avec des besoins particuliers

Par Emmanuelle Assor

C'est en mai dernier que Jean Vanier, l'illustre fondateur de L'Arche, est décédé. Philosophe, écrivain et humaniste reconnu, c'était un grand homme aux dires de tous. Il avait 90 ans. « Jean laisse un héritage et une longue vie d'accomplissements exceptionnels », dit Stephan Posner, responsable international de L'Arche.

Fils du gouverneur général du Canada Georges Vanier, Jean Vanier est né en 1928 à Genève. Selon le site de L'Arche, il s'engage très jeune dans l'accueil des survivants des camps de concentration à Paris et en ressort profondément marqué. Après des années de formation en France et au Canada, il obtient en 1962 un doctorat en philosophie et devient enseignant.

En 1964, il découvre les conditions de vie sordides des personnes handicapées dans les asiles psychiatriques et en réaction à ceci, il invite deux hommes vivant en

établissement à s'installer avec lui dans une petite maison près de Paris, qu'il baptise « L'Arche ». Rapidement, différents « foyers » naissent à travers le monde : au Canada en 1969, en Inde en 1970, en Côte d'Ivoire en 1974, en Haïti en 1975... Aujourd'hui, L'Arche comprend plus de 150 communautés dans 38 pays, dont 29 communautés et deux projets dans 9 provinces à travers le Canada.

Reconnu internationalement comme un homme de paix ayant une vision sociale unique, compagnon de l'Ordre du Canada, proposé pour le Prix Nobel de la Paix et récipiendaire du Prix Templeton, Jean Vanier a reçu de nombreux honneurs pour son travail innovant. Sa vision inspirante d'une société plus humaine dans laquelle chaque personne a une place et met ses dons à contribution, quel que soit son âge, ses capacités ou son histoire, a été partagée par le biais de multiples livres, entrevues et conférences publiques.

Selon Jean Vanier : « *L'Arche expérimente un paradoxe : les personnes que le monde juge inutiles et bonnes seulement à mettre dans des institutions – celles qui sont considérées comme un fardeau et un problème financier – sont en réalité des sources de lumière et de vie. Elles nous transforment en profondeur.* »

L'Arche à Montréal

À Montréal, l'histoire de la communauté a commencé le 16 septembre 1977 avec l'ouverture du premier foyer l'Esquif. L'Arche Montréal a célébré ses 40 ans d'existence en 2017. Aujourd'hui, la communauté accueille en permanence 25 personnes présentant une déficience intellectuelle dans cinq foyers (L'Esquif, La Colombe, L'Arc-en-ciel, La Passerelle et Le Rameau).

Pour en savoir plus sur l'Arche Montréal : <http://www.larche-montreal.org>

GALILEO EXPANDS PET THERAPY PROGRAM

Galileo Adult Education Centre began its pet therapy program in 2014 when certified pet therapist Alan Tourigny brought his seven-year-old Australian Shepherd to school. Gadget quickly became part of the school staff on his weekly visits, donning his very own Galileo t-shirt to class. Tourigny has also brought in two rabbits, a guinea pig, a hedgehog and birds.

The positive impact of animals on students with special needs encouraged Paula Laurentino, support staff at Galileo, to bring her 14-year-old Cocker Spaniel, Shana, to school, and art therapist Erica Nicole Onofrio to bring her three-year-old Australian Labradoodle, Moretti. Like Gadget and Shana, Moretti has a knack for helping students with their stress and anxiety. Onofrio notes how students who are nonverbal are able to express themselves in a respectful, tender, physical way in Moretti's presence. "Being an art therapist and working in a therapeutic fashion, having Moretti in my classroom not only puts a smile on the staff and students' faces, he also helps regulate emotions, creating a calm and playful environment," she said.

All pets are vetted by the pet therapist to be sure they are suited for the classroom and work environment. In order to proceed, it is imperative that all staff and students have agreed to interact with the pets.

"Gadget, Shana and Moretti have brought positive change to our work environment and a sense of calmness and happiness in our classrooms. It works," said Martina Schiavone, principal of Galileo.

–Wendy Singer



Students visit with their pet therapy dogs in Miss Erica's art therapy class at Galileo on October 10. (Photo, Lucrezia Termini)

Drumming up confidence at Galileo

By Randy Pinsky

"I feel good when I play the drums," said Alejandro Flores, a student with autism at the Galileo Adult Education Centre in Montreal North, and a participant in the school's drumming program. "It brings me a lot of happiness." Now in its third year, the Brazilian percussion group led by Leisure and Social Skills teacher Lisa Germile, even has a name: Brazileo.

A passionate drummer since 2010, Germile described how her small music class for adults with special needs quickly evolved into an impressive ensemble with drums that included surdos and snares. "Our principal Martina Schiavone encourages each teacher to explore and expand their own special niche," enthused Germile.

And why drumming? More than just a fun pastime, this multi-sensory experience is particularly well-suited to the special needs clientele, helping them develop fine and gross motor skills in a fun and collaborative environment. They also learn soft skills such as turn-taking, focus and commitment, and they have a sense of pride in being a part of a group effort. And as anyone who's ever had a chance to play on a djembe knows, drumming is the best way to get out stress! "It gives me a lot of confidence knowing that



Galileo's Brazilian percussion group rehearses for a show at Galileo. (Photo, Galileo Adult Education Centre)

I can follow the instructions," shared base-drum player Maria Kechian.

With its predictable patterns and logical sequences, percussion is an ideal fit for those with autism who thrive on routine. Students find reassurance in the patterns and pick up quickly. Germile and her colleagues have witnessed the boost in self-esteem and emotional management that goes beyond the drum studio. Preparing for performances also reinforces the importance of time and commitment.

Drumming is the perfect combination of left-brain logic and right-brain creativity. Cognitive development is enhanced as it involves an exciting blend of visual cues, sound and

physical exertion. As noted by Californian music therapy centre, Mewsic Moves, drumming is well-suited for those with special needs as it combines motor movement with auditory and visual feedback.

The casual atmosphere also reinforces that mistakes are permissible - and forgivable! As noted by student Caterina Pupo, "Playing the drums makes me feel better. I am proud of what I have accomplished."

The group has far exceeded Germile's expectations. "After the first show, I was so proud of them. You could see they were, too."

Stay tuned for Brazileo's next show at www.gaec.ca



Sports

With Sports Editor *Daniel Smajovits*



Blind hockey popular among visually impaired players

By *Martin C. Barry*

When you consider there are several notable athletes with disabilities who have managed to excel in professional baseball, football and other sports, can the day be far off when a blind or visually impaired hockey player competes in one of the world's professional hockey leagues?

A modified version of hockey to accommodate blind or visually impaired players was first played in this country in Toronto in 1972 by a team later to become known as the Ice Owls.

A group of players in Montreal started up their own team seven years later, and called themselves Les Hiboux. Today there are also blind hockey teams in Calgary, Edmonton and Vancouver. According to François Beauregard, who plays for Les Hiboux, around 150 blind or visually impaired people play blind hockey in Canada today. The matches are refereed by sighted officials.

An even greater number of children are also participating in the sport, he added, with support from the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, Courage Canada and other partners. At age 62, Beauregard, a former investment counsellor, is the oldest member of the Hiboux team. The youngest member is still in his teens. All have varying degrees of visual impairment, with most being legally blind.



Seen here during a recent practice at a municipal arena in Saint Hubert on Montreal's South Shore are several players from Les Hiboux de Montréal blind hockey team.

In May 2010, representatives from the Vancouver Eclipse, the Toronto Ice Owls and Les Hiboux de Montréal met to take part in the annual Défi sportif AlterGo parasport event, as well as to standardize the rules for playing blind hockey. "The Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal clubs agreed on the standardization of rules," said Beauregard. Not long after, matches between competing teams started to be held across the country. Since 2012, a final tournament takes place in Toronto. For the first time, in October 2018, a blind hockey Team Canada played against counterparts from Team U.S.A.

The most obvious thing that needed to be standardized was the puck. It can be hard enough chasing after an object just three inches in diameter and an inch thick on an ice rink for sighted players. Imagine what it's like for those with vision impairments. While attempts are underway to create an electronic-sound-emitting puck, the standard for the time being is a hollow and round object about twice the size of a regular puck. Fabricated from steel sheeting and painted black, it contains eight ball bearings that produce a loud rattling sound whenever the puck is in play.

"The puck does the job, but there are a couple of shortcomings," Beauregard said, noting that it doesn't emit sound when not on the ice in play or when it's moving through the air. An electronic puck would be emitting a steady beep at all times.

Although blind hockey is not currently recognized as an official paralympic sport, Beauregard said, "The ultimate goal is to become a paralympic sport in the winter paralympics sometime at the end of the next decade."

Martin C. Barry is a freelance writer with 22 years of experience working for community newspapers all over the Montreal region.

High-tech, audible puck under development at UQAM

Since the sport of blind hockey first started being played in Canada in the early 1970s, there has been virtually no improvement on the one particular piece of equipment that's vital to the game – the puck.

Although blind hockey players continue to use a low-tech puck – a device containing ball bearings that rattle loudly around – a high-tech improvement is on the way.

At the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), researchers think they have managed to overcome earlier limitations that prevented the development of a sound-emitting electronically-active puck. Previous attempts proved unfruitful because of the fragile nature of electronics and the brutal treatment routinely doled out to hockey pucks.

However, Steve Vezeau, an industrial design teacher at UQAM, who is also a friend of Gilles Ouellet who plays for Les Hiboux de Montréal, has been helping to develop an appropriate container. In the meantime, two of his colleagues, microelectronic engineers, are working on the issues of sound and a sturdy power supply.

Les Hiboux have had a chance to play and experiment on the ice with some of the prototypes, according to François Beauregard, who plays for Les Hiboux de Montréal. In the meantime, he added, the developers are seeking input from blind hockey players in other parts of Canada before deciding whether to move forward with a definitive product.

– *M.C.B.*



Les Hiboux de Montréal are one of several blind hockey teams who participate in organized play in major cities across Canada.



Sports

Young visually and physically-impaired students at the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton schools in NDG received a special visit on September 27 from two ambassadors for an exciting sport that is starting to take off in Canada – blind hockey.

Kelly Serbu, captain of the Team Canada blind hockey team, and Luca DeMontis, Team Canada's general manager and Canadian Blind Hockey Association's (CBH) program manager, were crossing the country spreading the word about blind hockey, and made a stop in Montreal.

While telling the teen and pre-teen students about the CBH blind hockey program, they also gave them some pointers on how to overcome adversity. This year marks a decade since Canadian Blind Hockey first got underway.

"It's been a long journey," said DeMontis. "However, as the journey's been going, the sport has progressed." After first starting with just six visually impaired youths from Toronto, more than 1,000 visually impaired young people across Canada now partici-

Philip E. Layton students learn about overcoming adversity with blind hockey

By Martin C. Barry

pate in the CBH blind hockey program for children and youths.

For his part, Serbu recounted that when he was a student in elementary school, his vision was perfectly normal. However, while in university it began to rapidly deteriorate so that he couldn't see writing on the blackboard clearly anymore and had to sit at the front.

Following a series of tests, he found out he had a genetic and degenerative eye condition called Stargardt macular dystrophy, and before he turned 20 he had become legally blind. After graduating from law school, Serbu became a lawyer and has practiced law for the past 23 years.

An avid amateur hockey player before losing much of his eyesight, Serbu said he found "new purpose" after taking up the blind hockey sport.

"I wanted to make sure that anyone out there who wanted to play hockey that didn't think they could, or their parents didn't think they could because of visual impairment [could play hockey]. I wanted that to change," he said.

Since then, Serbu added, he's tried to bring blind hockey to visually impaired children, while reminding others that the purpose

of sport is friendship and play. "Regardless of what your disability is, we all have something that we're dealing with," he said. "It's not a competition. You can accomplish whatever you want to. So whether you're visually impaired or you have another disability, trust me – it will not limit you."



Luca DeMontis (left), Team Canada blind hockey general manager, and Kelly Serbu (right), captain of the Team Canada blind hockey team, answer questions during a visit to Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton Schools on September 27.



La VATL devient la CAL

Par Altergo

Depuis le 7 mai dernier, la Vignette d'accompagnement touristique et de loisir (VATL) a changé de nom pour Carte accompagnement loisir (CAL). N'ayez crainte, la VATL continuera d'être acceptée jusqu'au 1^{er} octobre 2020.

La CAL

Tout comme la Vignette, la Carte accompagnement loisir accorde la gratuité d'entrée à l'accompagnateur d'une personne handicapée auprès des organisations de loisir, culturelles et touristiques partenaires.

Quelques modifications importantes sont apportées au programme :

- Les enfants âgés de 5 ans et plus sont admissibles à la CAL alors que l'âge requis pour la VATL était de 12 ans.

- La carte a une date d'expiration. Chaque détenteur de la CAL devra la renouveler tous les cinq ans.
- La CAL sera personnalisée avec la photo du détenteur afin de mieux contrôler son utilisation.
- Dorénavant, toutes les nouvelles demandes ou tous les renouvellements seront traités par l'Association québécoise pour le loisir des personnes handicapées (AQLPH).
- Il y a deux façons de faire votre demande, selon votre situation. C'est-à-dire si vous bénéficiez ou non de l'un des programmes gouvernementaux, de mesures à l'intention des personnes handicapées ou de l'une des cartes d'accompagnement reconnues aux fins de l'admissibilité.

1. Pour connaître tous les détails sur la CAL et remplir le formulaire approprié, rendez-vous au carteloisir.ca ou composez le 1 833 693-2253.
2. Vous avez le temps! La VATL continuera d'être acceptée pendant la période de transition soit jusqu'au 1^{er} octobre 2020. Prenez note qu'en raison d'un fort volume de demandes de la CAL, le délai de traitement est de plus de six semaines actuellement.

À qui s'adresse la carte?

La carte s'adresse aux personnes handicapées de 5 ans et plus qui nécessitent un accompagnement lors de la visite de sites touristiques et de loisirs pour s'alimenter, se déplacer, communiquer, réaliser ses soins personnels, s'orienter ou assurer le déroulement sécuritaire de l'activité.

L'accompagnateur

L'accompagnateur est une personne dont la présence à l'activité de loisir est nécessaire pour le soutien et l'aide qu'elle apporte exclusivement à une ou plusieurs personnes ayant une limitation fonctionnelle. Cette mesure de compensation facilite la participation de la personne handicapée à une activité de loisir. Cette assistance n'est pas normalement requise par la population dans la réalisation de l'activité en question.

Organisations partenaires

Si vous offrez des activités de loisir dans votre organisation, la CAL représente une occasion d'accroître votre marché, puisqu'elle permet la participation d'une clientèle qui, autrement, ne franchirait pas vos portes, en raison principalement des coûts supplémentaires engendrés par la présence indispensable de l'accompagnateur, afin de lui offrir l'aide requise pour se déplacer, s'orienter, se nourrir, etc.

En acceptant la CAL, vous pouvez faire la différence auprès des personnes handicapées! Faites votre demande en ligne dès maintenant!

À noter : Les organisations de loisir, culturelles et touristiques qui étaient partenaires de la VATL doivent renouveler leur adhésion au programme CAL en s'inscrivant.

Découvrir les endroits qui acceptent la carte ici : <https://www.aqlph.qc.ca/carte-accompagnement-loisir/repertoire-des-organisations-partenaires/>

Remplacer votre VATL ici : <https://www.aqlph.qc.ca/carte-accompagnement-loisir/utilisateurs/>



Arts & Entertainment



The Segal Centre features its first relaxed performance

By Cindy Davis

The Segal Centre for Performing Arts presented a “relaxed performance” (RP) of their original show *A Century Songbook – A musical journey celebrating 100 years of Jewish life in Montreal* on June 27. The RP was a venture they had been working on for over a year in conjunction with the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Rehabilitation of Greater Montreal.

This was the Segal Centre’s first RP, which provides an overall “relaxed” environment for audience members in order to make theatre more accessible for those with sensory sensitivities. Unlike the typical theatre experience, talking and general noise was not prohibited among audience members during the performance, and they were free to move around the theatre, and leave and re-enter as needed. Extra ushers were in place to support audience members, and a quiet rest area was created with an Applied Behaviour Analysis therapist on hand to provide a supportive, calm space for patrons who wanted it before, during and after the show.

Those who can benefit from an RP can include (but are not limited to) patrons with autism, visual and/or hearing impairment, language processing limitations, learning disabilities, anxiety, young children, those with physical impairments and those not comfortable with the conventions of a traditional theatre space.

Production adjustments were also made to reduce the intensity of light, sound and startling effects. Support tools were made available in advance of the performance including familiarization visits, virtual visits, visual story aids, study guides, braille program books and braille bar menus, to ensure that everyone felt comfortable with the experience.

“Theatre is a wonderful way to make people’s lives better – whether it is simply by entertaining them and bringing them joy, or by making them think and even sometimes help them work through personal obstacles,” said Émilie Hervieux, senior marketing associate at The Segal Centre. “It creates connections and brings people together. It changes our perspective on society, in our relationships, and helps us evolve as humans. At the Segal Centre, we believe that theatre should be made accessible to all, no matter what your abilities are.”

This first RP went remarkably smoothly, said Hervieux, who noted that their usual patrons were curious about the initiative, asked many questions and gave positive feedback.

This RP was only one part of the Accessibility Program at the Segal Centre, which has been offering American Sign Language (ASL) interpreted performances since 2015. Assistive listening audio-systems are avail-



The cast of *A Century Songbook* perform at The Segal Centre. (Photo, Leslie Schachter)

Theatre teams up with researchers to make space and art more accessible

By Walter Wittich

The Segal Centre is endeavouring to identify and overcome existing barriers faced by individuals with disabilities when accessing and experiencing theatre performances. It hosted its first-ever relaxed performance (RP) this past summer with support from the Conseil des arts de Montréal and as a recipient of a new grant from Inclusive Society as part of their Partnership Research Program funded by the Fonds de recherche du Québec, and in collaboration with the Centre for Interdisciplinary Research in Rehabilitation of Greater Montreal researchers, faculty members of the Université de Montréal and McGill University,

The research partnership between the arts community at the Segal Centre and the researchers based within the academic environment focused on the use of qualitative methods to explore the existing facilitators and potential access barriers within the context of the performance of *A Century Songbook – A musical journey celebrating 100 years of Jewish life in Montreal*.

The researchers collected observations, opinions and impressions from members of the casts, crew, staff, as well as from patrons of the Segal Centre who live with a disability and attend events at the Segal Centre. This large team effort included sensitization training for the staff, a walk-through of the spaces that are open to patrons (e.g., the lobby and audience space), as well as focus groups and interviews with participants before and after the RP. In the coming months, the team will

analyze and summarize the outcome and develop a list of recommendations for live theatre venues, such as the Segal Centre, that can be implemented in order to facilitate RPs in the future, and make the theatre experience more accessible and enjoyable for all.

able in one of their theatres, and the Centre also offers tickets at 50 percent discount to support persons who accompany patrons with special needs (subject to availability). They also offer discounted rates for some productions to low-income and marginalized groups.

In September, the Segal Centre also presented its first ever audio-described performance of *The Pianist of Willesden Lane*, in collaboration with Connec-T ser-



A group of researchers, patrons of the Segal Centre who live with a disability, and Segal Centre staff gather to conduct a walk-through of the Centre to suggest improvements to accessibility. (Photo, The Segal Centre)

Walter Wittich, PhD FFAO CLVT is an assistant professor at the School of Optometry at Université de Montréal. For more information, contact him at walter.witich@umontreal.ca.

vices d’audioscription. The performance allowed audience members to use an app on their phones and their own earphones to hear enhanced sound and narration of the performance.

The Segal Centre plans to have more RPs and ASL-interpreted performances this year, as well as more audio-described performances in the 2019-2020 season, and a more “structured” catalogue of accessible offerings in 2020-2021.



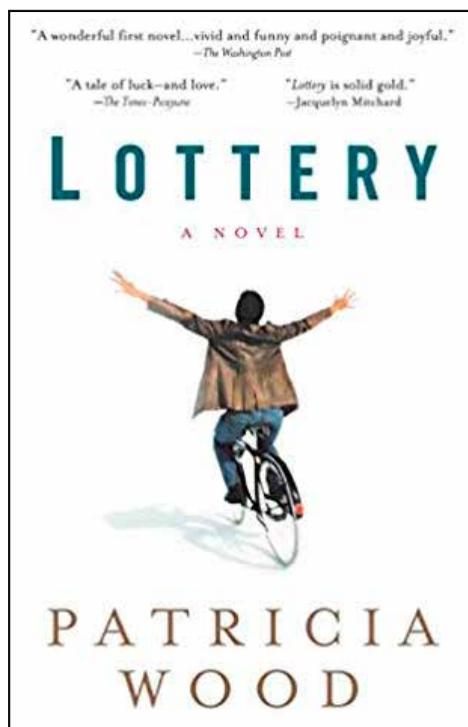
Arts & Entertainment

Lottery author emits a windfall of information with sensitivity and wit By Patricia Wood, Penguin Random House, 2008

Lottery may have been Patricia Wood's debut novel but the author's background, education, personal experience and writing talent serve as an advantage. All these components come into play in this 336-page soft cover pocket book.

Wood grew up in Seattle, Washington, interacted with a brother-in-law who had profound intellectual disabilities and taught high-risk high school students. While working toward a PhD at university, Wood was awarded a certificate in disability studies. Married to an architect, she and her husband live on a sailboat moored in Hawaii. Wood's father had a winning ticket in a Washington State Lottery. She sheds light on people's reactions and what transpires behind the scenes.

Readers meet protagonist Perry L. (Lucky) Crandall, 31, in the prologue and from that point on, Perry voices his fears, fantasies and difficulty perceiving non-verbal clues



in social situations. He is unable to concentrate on a task, if distracted. He stresses he is slow but not "retarded," a term he abhors, noting he has an IQ of 76. He lacks confidence because people taunt him, remark on his physical features and label him without regard for his feelings and competence. Perry is considerate of others, organized, conscientious, listens to customers at the store, increases sales, remembers things, excels at board games, is well-mannered, clean, neat and pays his bills. He likes to please and thrives on recognition.

The author, through Perry's first-person narrative, succeeds in painting vivid word portraits of everyone and everything Perry encounters. Along with pathos, the author offers a generous helping of humour, so we get to laugh and cry.

Perry's grandmother "Gram" and grandfather "Gramp" adopt and nurture him. While Gramp teaches him to sail, maintain and repair equipment, Gram tutors him through

By Elaine Cohen
school, teaches him life skills and how to play games. She cautions him not to be so "suggestible," especially where his absentee mother and siblings are concerned. Gram outlives Gramp but with Perry's help is able to maintain their spartan cottage in Everett, a seaport in northwestern Washington on Puget Sound. Gram has willed the house to Perry but when she dies, Perry's scheming mother and siblings con him out of the property and his rightful compensation.

If not for his employer Gary, owner of Holsted's Marine Supply; Keith, a Vietnam War veteran and friend from work; and Cherry, a convenience store clerk Perry adores, he would end up destitute. His luck turns after winning \$12 million in the Washington State Lottery, but his family dumps on him again, and their schemes intensify. The author engages readers, introducing thought-provoking developments until the end.

Autiste, bientôt majeur : un documentaire à voir absolument!

Par Emmanuelle Assor

C'est avec beaucoup d'anticipation et d'émotions que j'ai regardé le premier épisode de la série documentaire *Autiste, bientôt majeur*.

En 22 minutes, toutes les questions importantes que se posent les parents d'enfants autistes sont soulevées : Comment gérer « un gamin dans un corps d'adulte »? Que se passera-t-il quand je serai mort et que je ne pourrai plus m'occuper de lui? Qui prendra la relève? Comment rendre heureux mon enfant dans un monde « neurotypique »?

Tout au long de ce premier épisode où l'on suit plusieurs parents d'autistes adolescents, ce qui frappe est la similarité des expériences. Qu'il s'agisse de personnalités connues comme Charles Lafortune et Sophie Prigent ou des autres, le constat est le même : il y a un « avant »

et un « après le diagnostic ». Il y a le monde qui s'écroule, la peur de ce qui nous attend, les renoncements nécessaires, la quête de réponses, l'espoir et surtout l'amour, beaucoup d'amour. Tous constatent un manque de services. Il ne semble pas qu'il y ait de plan intégré en autisme au Québec, alors les parents s'impliquent car ils n'ont pas le choix. Cette cause devient leur cause.

Charles Lafortune parle avec grande émotion de son envie de communiquer avec son fils, d'avoir une « vraie » conversation. Sophie Prigent souligne que la vie de couple n'est plus la même. « On fait le choix de rester ensemble. Il n'y a plus de magie, juste de la fonctionnalité, il faut que ça marche. Quand tu fais le constat qu'on est mieux à trois qu'à deux, tu travailles sur ta relation ». Un cri du cœur teinté de réalisme et d'une sincérité si touchante.



(Photo : MOI ET CIE)

Un autre père fantastique dit : « On n'a pas d'outils pour qu'on s'aime... alors on les développe [...] Je sais que je peux faire quelque chose pour mon fils ». Ainsi sont posées les fondations pour la suite de cette série qui parlera de la vie au quotidien avec un autiste bientôt adulte, du regard des autres, des passions, de l'avenir.

Personnellement, j'ai adoré le fait que ce premier épisode parlait surtout des parents. Sujet peu abordé et si intéressant! J'ai aussi constaté, avec tristesse, que nous vivons

tous la même chose, peu importe le niveau d'autisme de nos enfants. Car nous voulons tous un monde meilleur pour eux, nous sommes tous inquiets de ce qui va leur arriver une fois adultes, nous nous demandons tous comment mener une vie de famille satisfaisante, comment faire face à un avenir incertain. Très hâte aux prochains épisodes!

Pour regarder *Autiste, bientôt majeur*, visitez <http://tv.moietcie.ca/documentaires/autiste-bientot-majeur/episodes>



Arts & Entertainment



Music therapy alters brain connectivity and social communication in children with autism

By Cynthia Di Francesco

The profound impact that music has on individuals with autism has been written about since the first description of autism in the 1940s, with parents and caregivers reporting a natural interest and positive response to music. In the past few years, the clinical application of music has been gaining recognition as an effective therapy for people with autism. However, no studies have examined how the brain may be impacted by a music-based intervention in children with autism.

To gain a better understanding of music therapy (MT) in autism, researchers from Université de Montréal's International Laboratory for Brain, Music and Sound Research (BRAMS) and McGill University's School of Communication Sciences and Disorders collaborated with Westmount Music Therapy in Montreal. A total of 51 families took part in a study comparing the effects of a music intervention to a non-music play intervention in six to 12-year-

old children with autism. The children were randomly selected to receive one of the interventions for eight to 12 weeks, which took place in the same setting with the same therapist. However, one used musical activities, such as singing and music-making, and the other used play-based activities, such as puzzles and playdough.

All children were tested in the laboratory before and after intervention on a range of behavioural and brain connectivity measures. Researchers found that the children who underwent MT showed improvements beyond those observed in the control group, particularly in the child's communication skills (parent-reported) and family quality of life. In addition, MRI scans of the children after MT showed increased connectivity between auditory and motor regions of the brain, often reduced in autism, and decreased over-connectivity between auditory and visual regions of the brain. Furthermore, these changes in brain connectivity

were related to the children's improvement in communication skills.

This research supports MT as a promising intervention for improving social communication in school-age children with autism, possibly through the alteration of brain connectivity. These findings were published in the journal *Translational Psychiatry* last fall.

Given the importance of the findings observed in this study, follow-up studies are currently being conducted at Dr. Aparna Nadig's Psychology of Pragmatics (PoP) Lab at McGill University to better understand different aspects of MT. One study investigates what makes MT more effective than other treatments of similar intensity. Specifically, this study centres on whether joint engagement with the therapist and movement – inherent to music-making – are key “ingredients” in MT that may drive its benefits. In a complementary study, an investigation is taking place on individual

differences among children with autism that predict successful treatment outcomes. Given that children with autism present with varying symptoms, the aim is to identify which symptom profile might respond better to the music intervention.

Given the affordability and accessibility of music, there is growing interest in using music-based therapies for a wide range of neuropsychiatric conditions. This research is crucial to provide evidence for the effectiveness of MT in autism, and to improve future practice.

Cynthia Di Francesco is an undergraduate student and member of the PoP Lab at McGill University.

Researchers who participated in this study are: Megha Sharda, Carola Tuerk, Rakhee Chowdhury, Kevin Jamey, Nicholas Foster, Melanie Custo-Blanch, Melissa Tan, Aparna Nadig, and Krista Hyde, 2018.

Les Muses arts centre taps into talent of aspiring performing artists with disabilities

By Elaine Cohen

Montreal abounds in joie de vivre, and for more than a decade, Les Muses: Centre des arts de la scène has raised the curtain on inclusivity. Les Muses conducts a unique training program for adults living with a disability and blessed with an inherent talent in the performing arts.

In 2013, Gabrielle Marion-Rivard, star of Louise Archambault's French Canadian film drama, *Gabrielle*, drew rave reviews. The story is fictional and not based on Marion-Rivard's life. The film was submitted as an entry in the Best Foreign Language Film category for Canada at the Academy Awards in 2014. The same year, the film was nominated for six Canadian Screen Awards, and Marion-Rivard won the award for best actress in a leading role. The cast of *Gabrielle* included eight others from Les Muses. Their training and interaction with professional artists at Les Muses had served them well.

Since the film gained recognition, Marion-Rivard, who has William's syndrome, has

worked nonstop. Les Muses is registered as a charitable organization and receives project grants from government and organizations but requires funding for ongoing development. “We have a waiting list and need to form another group,” said founding director Cindy Schwartz.

After passing the initial audition, candidates follow a six-month trial period. If chosen, they embark on five years of full-time week-day training in the entire curriculum. “We try to integrate them into an artistic milieu as much as possible,” Schwartz explained. Professional artists are brought in. For example, vocalist Johanne Blouin gave master classes within Les Muses program.

“Dance has always been a big part of my life,” said Schwartz, who started with ballet lessons at six and subsequently veered into modern dance, contemporary dance, ballet-jazz and some tap dance. She also attained a Masters in Education from McGill University. “Just after completing my degree, I was involved in dance classes and guidance counselling at schools, rehabilitation

centres and other venues. Around 1995, I was still teaching dance but hiring instructors for afterschool programs in music, acting and visual arts.”

In 1997, Schwartz founded Les Muses as a non-profit organization, while she continued to teach adolescents and adults at schools and other venues. By 2001, Les Muses had formed a partnership (which she describes as a pilot project) with a rehabilitation centre, and implemented a full-time professional program geared to adults with intellectual disabilities.

Since 2006, Les Muses has been housed at Centre Champagnat, a francophone adult education centre at 5017 St-Hubert St. “We are partners mainly with the CSDM and



A scene from the show “Fêtes, petites écorchures et effet presque spéciaux” from Cabaret 2017 at Place des Arts illustrates the talent Les Muses: Centre des arts de la scène performers contribute to the stage. (Photo, Les Muses Centre des arts de la scène)

the CIUSS centre du sud-de-l'île-de-Montréal,” said Schwartz. “As a result, programs are mainly in French but we are also open to working with other rehabilitation centres.” She focuses on administration and oversees seven instructors who train 17 aspiring artists.

For information, visit www.lesmuses.org



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McGill OT team studies access to recreational activities in Laval

Art classes, adapted sports, social events – parents of youth with special needs are always on the lookout for activities to challenge and engage young adults. But are regions, such as Laval, adequately equipped to service this clientele? And even if such activities do exist, do they match the youths' interests and needs?

A team of Occupational Therapy (OT) Masters students from McGill University has set out to address this very challenge. They assessed resources and opportunities for young adults in the Laval area, seeking to explore what could influence – or hinder – their engagement.

Partnering with the Laval Centre de réadaptation en déficience intellectuelle et en troubles envahissants du développement (CRDITED), the researchers focused on activity participation. Considered a “fundamental component of health” by the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health of the World Health Organization (2001), leisure is an integral component of enjoyment, fulfillment and self-development (American Association of Intellectual Disabilities and Developmental Disabilities, 2010).

In order to examine participation trends, the team first did an assessment scan of the existing resources available for the special needs community, using the popular Jooy app. They concluded that Laval does not have many leisure options for those in the 16 to 21 age bracket, and that those that do exist are not always well-attended.

To analyze these findings, the McGill students interviewed three focus groups: the youth themselves, their parents, and clinicians who work in the field. They assessed awareness about the available options, and

then examined contributing factors that could be influencing participation.

Environmental barriers include technical issues such as accessibility and language challenges. More revealing were the personal factors such as insufficient adaptation and functional limitations, as well as whether the activities met the interests – and needs – of those they were intended for.

“Many parents wished there were more specially trained staff, particularly for non-verbal youth, and activities on self-improvement, rather than just leisure,” researcher Claire Hogeveen said. Other caregivers expressed disappointment that the events lacked a learning component, saying; “It’s nice to go on an outing, but you also have to stimulate them.”

Another point of contention stemmed from the fact that individuals with intellectual disabilities are often grouped with those on the autism spectrum. While this combination may be one of convenience, Hogeveen remarked, “It can be to the disadvantage of both as recreation often cannot accommodate their very different capabilities and interests.” As a result, one activity for all will leave some feeling rushed and stressed, and others, unstimulated and unmotivated.

McGill’s dedicated research team hopes their results will be used to inform policies and advocate for more varied and adapted programming. In addition to presenting their findings to their colleagues, they also spoke in front of Laval’s CRDITED, and are considering publishing in the journal *Autism*. It is through consulting with the stakeholders involved that there can be more developmentally-appropriate opportunities for this cohort.

By **Randy Pinsky**



On November 7, Derek and Richard Stern and the Wiltzer family welcomed guests to a cocktail reception at Kandy Gallery in honour of Noach Braun, founder of the Israel Guide Dog Center, and Eli Yablonek, Yom Kippur war veteran and Glen, Yablonek’s guide dog.

Founded in 1991, The Israel Guide Dog Center for the blind is the only accredited organization in Israel that provides guide dogs to blind and visually impaired Israelis and ser-

Derek Stern, Israeli Consul General David Levy, Eli Yablonek with his guide dog Glen, Eddie Wiltzer and Noach Braun at Kandy Gallery on November 7.

L'autisme et l'art

Par **Emmanuelle Assor**

Les personnes autistes entretiennent souvent un lien privilégié avec la musique, la peinture, l'écriture et même l'humour. Probablement à cause de certaines particularités sensorielles (une sensibilité particulière à la lumière, aux sons, aux couleurs et textures), les autistes sont très sensibles à l'art.

Plusieurs parents d'enfants autistes, comme moi, ont constaté avec plaisir cette connexion entre leurs enfants et la musique, par exemple. Pourtant, le choix d'activités culturelles pour personnes autistes reste limité, à quelques exceptions près. Soulignons l'effort du Centre Segal qui a ouvert ses portes aux personnes ayant des besoins spéciaux le 27 juin dernier. Dans le cadre d'une soirée « décontractée », le spectacle « A Century Songbook » s'est déroulé devant une salle comble. Pour l'occasion, la lumière était tamisée, des accompagnateurs étaient sur place et les bruits étaient tolérés. Assise à côté de moi, une dame et ses deux enfants en bas âge se sont levés à plusieurs reprises, ont chantonné et applaudi très fort. Le tout dans une ambiance de tolérance et d'amusement du public.

De l'autre côté de l'océan, à Paris depuis le printemps 2019, l'Atelier des lumières a présenté, en musique et en images, l'exceptionnelle œuvre de Vincent Van Gogh. Dans un atelier-hangar où chacun pouvait vaquer à sa guise, tant des adultes que des enfants, des projections vidéos de ses plus beaux tableaux étaient diffusées sur les murs, le sol et même dans des bassins d'eau aménagés à cet effet. Le tout bercé de morceaux de musique savamment choisis, en passant du classique au jazz, suivant le parcours tortueux du peintre. Vers la fin de cette expérience immersive de 30 minutes, la musique envoûtante de Nina Simone « Don't let me be misunderstood » faisait vibrer la salle. Un moment de grâce et d'émotion pure.

Étrangement, cette sublime exposition a été conçue pour les autistes sans le savoir.

Entre le son, le décor et les jeux de lumière, la beauté de l'œuvre intemporelle de cet artiste était mise en valeur comme jamais. Mon fils autiste de 9 ans était transporté dans un autre monde, celui de couleurs éclatantes et de sensations palpables, dans un cadre libre. Contrairement au musée qui contraint le spectateur à un parcours rigide et prédéterminé, où l'on doit longer les murs sans faire de bruit, l'expo de Van Gogh permettait au spectateur d'être son propre guide. Certaines personnes étaient assises, d'autres debout, des enfants couraient en riant. Un réel plaisir pour les yeux et le cœur.

Pour en savoir plus sur l'Atelier des lumières et le Centre Segal : <https://www.atelier-lumieres.com/fr/evenements-en-cours-et-a-venir>

<https://segalcentre.org/en/shows/2018-2019/relaxed-performances>

Emmanuelle Assor est journaliste pigiste et la fière mère d'un garçon autiste de 9 ans.

L'Exposition « Imagine Van Gogh » sera présentée à l'Arsenal à Montréal à partir du 3 décembre 2019. Pour les billets : <https://www.imagine-vangogh.ca/>



Photo de l'exposition Van Gogh à l'Atelier des lumières à Paris

vice dogs to those with post-traumatic stress disorder, autism and other special needs.

The event provided an opportunity for guests to learn about the work of the center, from fostering and training puppies to supporting their humans once the dog's work life ends after eight to 10 years, and how they can donate to support their work.

Glen is Yablonek's first guide dog from Israel Guide Dog Centre. His first two were trained in the United States. He describes Glen as smart and trustworthy, with a “gorgeous” memory. “Glen knows his job and how to work. He's not afraid. I trust him and he trusts me. We are one,” he said, acknowledging the independence and companionship that Glen provides him.

Visit www.israelguidedog.ca to make a donation.
— Wendy Singer



TRAVEL

ADAPTED TRAVEL

Vegas in the summer is pure delight: The Park MGM, magnificent pools and fine dining

By Alexandra Cohen

LAS VEGAS - When in search of a summer holiday last July, I could not think of a better choice than Las Vegas (<http://www.lasvegastourism.com>) where visitors are offered the perfect combination of relaxation and fun. I have visited Las Vegas before in the winter, but having never visited in the summer, I had not yet had the privilege of experiencing some of the amazing resort swimming pools that Vegas has to offer.

Vegas truly is the epitome of an epic tourist destination, with more than 42 million visitors and nearly 24 thousand conventions annually. Las Vegas has everything that a vacationer could possibly ask for: concerts, shows, sports, shopping, dining, nightlife, golf courses, spas, adventure activities, luxury accommodations, and more. It is a place for an adult trip but also a place for the entire family to enjoy themselves.

ACCESSIBILITY: Las Vegas has more accessible guest rooms than any other city in the United States. Hotels have rooms with roll-in showers, transfer showers, tubs with built-in seats, and tubs with portable seats. However, it is of course recommended that you talk to the reservation operator about your specific requirements beforehand. If you need additional details, ask for the hotel's ADA coordinator. For an overview of room availability, call the *Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority Reservations Center: Voice/TTY - 1-800-884-2592*.

Most hotels have assistive listening devices for those who are hearing-impaired. Wheelchair seating is also available in

most restaurants, lounges, and showrooms. Call ahead for details.

All hotels have accessible slot machines, and many have sit-down table games. Many hotels also have accommodations for wheelchair users to play craps. Gaming personnel are well-trained in assisting vision- and hearing-impaired people to play table games. Most bingo rooms have Braille cards and large-print cards.

Not only that, but all taxi companies in Las Vegas have lift-equipped vans accommodating one wheelchair. Call from your room, use any dedicated taxi phone, or just ask the doorman at your hotel for an accessible taxi van.

Bring along your hometown dashboard parking permit from your personal vehicle if you plan to rent a vehicle in Las Vegas. Out-of-state permits are recognized. Temporary disabled parking permits are available through the Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles. *Contact them in advance for an application at DMV Special Plates, 775-684-4750, in Carson City, or visit www.dmvnv.com.* A physician's statement will be required. Alternatively, valet parking is available at most hotels.

The Las Vegas Monorail offers service at seven stations between Sahara Avenue and Tropicana Avenue on the east side of the Las Vegas Strip. Additionally, visitors can take advantage of trams that connect various properties: Between the Mirage and Treasure Island; connecting Mandalay Bay, Luxor and Excalibur; and connecting Park MGM Las Vegas to Aria Resort, Crystals Shopping Center, and Bellagio Resort.

WHERE TO STAY: For this trip we spent our eight nights at the Park MGM (<https://www.parkmgm.com/en.html>), formerly known as the Monte Carlo Hotel.

A partnership between Sydell Group and MGM Resorts International, Park MGM was born from the collaborative vision of the New York-based lifestyle hotelier and one of the world's preeminent destination resort developers.



Eataly Las Vegas.

The hotel complex comprises two new distinct experiences: Park MGM, and a Las Vegas version of the renowned NoMad, a standalone 293-room hotel encompassing the tower's top four floors.

Park MGM's hotel design is inspired by nature, as seen both in the lobby and in the newly renovated casino. Although renovated, the casino still has some touches of the old Monte Carlo casino, including its beautiful chandeliers.

With its excellent central location on the Vegas Strip, Park MGM offers guests direct access to what is quickly becoming the city's premier entertainment district, featuring the T-Mobile Arena, The Park, and Park Theater, which mostly recently houses the Las Vegas residencies of both Lady Gaga and Janet Jackson. Merchandise for both concerts can be found on site at the hotel.

The Park MGM has 2,700 guestrooms and suites, intended to give off a residential feel. There are three distinctive guest suite types: Nighthawk, Nightingale and Skylark. The Peacock Hospitality Suite features 700 square feet of social and entertainment space with an adjoining guest room.

We stayed in a beautiful King bedroom and could not have been happier with the accommodations. Immediately upon entering the room, we noticed the residential feel, complete with a lovely and comfortable window seat overlooking the swimming pool complex. The fresh bathroom offered a spacious walk-in shower. There are bedside outlets for phones and computers, blackout shades, a

laptop-sized electronic in-room safe, a hair dryer, a television with cable and movie service, high speed Wi-Fi, and both self-check-in and mobile check out. We would gladly return to this hotel for another stay. Filled with natural light and punctuated by nature-inspired décor and art, Park MGM's lobby is a nod to urban gardens and parks, including the adjacent Park neighborhood, bringing the outdoors inside. A dramatic arboreal sculpture by Brazilian woodworker Henrique Oliveira is the focal point of the lobby. The remarkable tree sculpture extends from above with its roots stretching across the ceiling. Throughout the lobby, guests are invited to explore intriguing works by the likes of David Hockney, Shahram Karimi and Shoja Azari, and many others.

Park MGM's rooms evoke the essence of a private apartment with a mix of thoughtful touches, antique-inspired pieces, "found" objects and original artwork by artists and photographers from around the world commissioned for each room by France's be-pôles studio.

Park MGM gladly offers dog friendly rooms as well, complete with doggie butler services.

Wheelchair accessible rooms have grab rails, a roll-in shower with a bench and wide entry for wheelchairs and scooters.

All MGM properties have a selection of fully compliant ADA guestrooms.

POOL EXPERIENCE: The pools at Park MGM offer a highly relaxing escape from the hustle and bustle of the Vegas Strip. There are three pools—the South, East, and North Pools—as well as 12 cabanas, lounge areas, multiple bars, and a spa. Poolside food and beverages can be delivered directly to your seat as you take in the sun.

A nice feature of all three pools is the Baja shelf seating with submerged wet decks, which allows visitors to sunbathe while still managing to stay cool. The East Pool is converted into a 21 plus experience



The Park MGM lobby.



TRAVEL

on weekends. Those seeking an elevated experience can reserve cushioned chaises or daybeds by the pool.

Three bars offer refreshing poolside cocktails, with Vista Bar serving as the main pool bar, featuring a tropics-inspired beverage program and dedicated seating with a view overlooking the pool. Light bites include dishes ranging from a Watermelon & Arugula Salad to Fajita Chicken Nachos.

Twelve private cabanas serve up VIP treatment with deluxe amenities, including a 55-inch LED television; a misting system for when the heat becomes too much to bear; a personal safe; and ample seating with plush cushions, lounges and umbrellas. Cabana guests can enjoy a variety of beverages, including large-format bottle service and fresh, summery food. The pool area is wheelchair accessible.

DINING OUT AT THE PARK MGM: The Park MGM boasts a wide selection of restaurants for any Las Vegas palette.

The dining highlight of Park MGM is without a doubt Eataly Las Vegas, a 40,000-square-foot culinary destination found at Park MGM's main entrance. Eataly is a vibrant space that transports you to the streets of Italy, featuring unique food counters, bars, and cafes, all helmed by Executive Chef Nicole Brisson. A fascinating aspect of the Eataly experience is referred to as Cucina del Mercato, which translates to "Kitchen of the Market." Meat, fish, cheese, as well as other delicacies, can be purchased as is and cooked at home, or can be cooked in front of your eyes at each individual restaurant. Six different fresh counters are available for visitors. The facility is wheelchair accessible.

BRUNCH AT PRIMROSE: On our first day in Las Vegas, we had the pleasure of enjoying a delicious brunch at Primrose, found in the lobby of the Park MGM, with the option of outdoor seating with a view of the hotel's pool complex (<https://www.mgmresorts.com/en/restaurants/park-mgm/primrose.html>).



Best Friend.

The talented culinary team uses fresh seafood and vegetables to highlight menu items. With a distinctively residential feel, the restaurant includes a series of cushioned seats, each with different patterns. While Primrose offers dinner selections as well, we were quite impressed with their brunch offerings, including classics like three eggs any style but also featuring an eggs benedict topped with blue crab. Those interested in a boozy brunch can add on an all-you-can-drink option of mimosas (\$29) or rosé (\$35). Primrose was undoubtedly the perfect way to begin our day before relaxing at the pool next door. Access to and seating at standard tables are suited for wheelchairs.

DINNER AT BEST FRIEND: Los Angeles culinary legend Roy Choi debuted his Koreatown-inspired restaurant, Best Friend, at the Park MGM. Having now experienced it myself, I can say that Best Friend is more than simply a tasty meal—it is a dining experience!

Entering Best Friend, you would not think it to be anything special. In fact, it appears more like a convenience store with a small bar at the back than a true restaurant. However, behind the vinyl red curtains near the cash lies the true restaurant, hidden from the prying eyes of those in the nearby hotel casino.

The drink menu includes offerings of wine and sake, as well as both classic cocktails and 80s-inspired drinks, including the Fuzzy Navel, which we very much enjoyed at the start of our meal. We also tasted what our waiter described as some of their most popular dishes, including the tasty kogi short-rib tacos, their mixed tempura appetizer, and the garlic jidori chicken BBQ, all of which was delicious. The menu, however, is diverse enough to satisfy any culinary preferences. The restaurant has wheelchair access.

SAKE ROK: One of the restaurants we really wanted to try on this trip was Sake Rok (<https://sakeroklv.com>), located at The Park complex directly across the street from Park MGM. Sake Rok combines Japan's vibrant pop culture and fashion scene with over-the-top theatrics. A host calls out to people as they eat, joking around, encouraging them to down their sake bombs, and occasionally belting out a tune.

The menu boasts a variety of playful Japanese favorites: we started off with some edamame before trying an appetizer order of beef satay, the volcano sushi roll, and an order of the miso-glazed sea bass. For dessert, we tasted a unique dessert called "honey toast." Other newer menu items



The primrose dining room.

include pork belly, shrimp risotto, and the ronin roll, which is a fried sushi roll.

Sake Rok now offers sushi rolling classes led by Executive Chef Sung Park, with packages starting at \$150 per person or \$250 per couple on Saturdays at 12 p.m. and 2 p.m. Those enrolled in the class will be able to take home what they make. Sake Rok is wheelchair accessible.

For more information, or to see the full menu, visit the website at www.sakeroklv.com or call 702-706-3022.

SADELLE'S AT THE BELLAGIO: Inspired by the beautiful villages of Europe, the AAA Five Diamond Bellagio Resort & Casino (www.bellagio.com) overlooks a large lake, in which the iconic fountain shows take place daily and nightly at regular intervals.

The Bellagio recently welcomed Sadelle's, SoHo's popular vintage-style restaurant, to the resort's list of dining experiences. The location overlooks the Bellagio Conservatory, which features an ever-changing set of artistic displays.

"We are taking everything great about Sadelle's in New York and taking it to the next level in Las Vegas," said Major Food Group Managing Partner Jeff Zalaznick. "The incredible space, overlooking the Bellagio Conservatory, along with an elevated menu focused on quintessential classics, allow us to create a one-of-a-kind culinary experience from early morning through late night."

Throughout the day and night, impressive presentations of hand-rolled bagels, lox towers, chopped salads, sandwiches and other favorites can be ordered.

Mainstays from the original New York City location – such as the Spicy Fried Chicken with acacia honey and coleslaw – join new signature supper offerings created by the culinary team, including the Grilled Branzino with Meyer lemon and sesame spinach and a New York-style Ribeye with smoth-

ered onions. We very much enjoyed the tomato cream soup appetizer, as well as the tuna tartare, followed by the generously sized and flavorful garlic chicken.

The Sadelle's dining space also includes an elevated bar and lounge, with spacious cocktail tables to accommodate guests seeking appetizers, bar snacks, or drinks. The restaurant is open for breakfast, lunch, and dinner Monday through Sunday from 6 a.m. – midnight. To make reservations for 10 or more, call Sadelle's directly at 702-693-8401.

Wheelchairairtravel.org says this about the Bellagio: "The hotel's accessibility is spot-on and ADA compliant in nearly every way. Top-notch accessibility, luxury accommodations and a fantastic location all combine to make Bellagio one of my favorite places to stay in Las Vegas." It features 85 accessible rooms, and two of them even have their own Hoyer lifts. If you're just visiting for the day, you can rent wheelchairs and scooters at the front desk on a first-come, first-serve basis.

TAO: Having previously experienced the restaurant TAO in New York City, we were thrilled to get a reservation at their 40,000 square foot restaurant, located at the Venetian-Resort-Hotel Casino (www.taolasvegas.com). TAO opened in New York City in 2000 and has retained its status as a hot spot, attracting celebrities and sports figures alike. TAO Las Vegas, which debuted in 2005, is a multi-faceted and multi-story "Asian City," which houses a restaurant, banquet facilities, a lounge, a nightclub and a seasonal beach.

An extensive collection of Buddha statues watch over every corner of TAO, including a unique reclining Buddha, and TAO's signature 20-foot Buddha that "floats" peacefully above an infinity pool complete with Japanese koi fish.

Corporate Executive Chef Ralph Scardella has developed a menu for the 400-seat restaurant, which incorporates culinary components from China, Japan



Sadelle's house salmon and salmon salad tower with signature bagels.



and Thailand. During our visit, we tasted several appetizer offerings, including the spicy tuna tartare on crispy rice, the king crab California sushi roll, and the lobster and shrimp spring roll paired with spicy pineapple sauce. Next, we had one of their signature dishes (and our personal favorite!), the Chilean sea bass satay with wok roasted asparagus and a miso glaze. TAO also offers an extensive menu of delicious specialty cocktails, including the TAO-tini, Lychee Martini, as well as sake flights specifically designed to complement TAO's menu. For dessert, try their elaborate and large fortune cookie, which includes decadent milk chocolate and white chocolate mousse.

For those craving a high energy, DJ-driven atmosphere, visit the 12,000 square-foot TAO Nightclub, which includes three full-service bars, two main rooms playing a variety of music genres, and state-of-the-art audio and lighting systems. For guests seeking ultra-VIP treatment, the nightclub offers eight private skyboxes. The nightclub also boasts a 40-foot outside terrace with awe-inspiring views of the famed Las Vegas Strip.

When the weather heats up, TAO Beach offers the hottest daytime experience in Las Vegas. Guests can secure a reservation to lounge poolside in one of 12 luxury cabanas that feature amenities such as air-conditioning, HD plasma screen televisions with gaming consoles, WiFi, and customized mini-bars.

TAO is located on the Grand Canal Shoppes level of The Venetian at 3377 Las Vegas Boulevard South. It is fully wheelchair accessible. In addition, TAO conveniently offers guests an exclusive valet located directly in front of The Venetian. For more information or reservations, call 702- 388-8588.

According to CurbfreewithCorylee.com, The Venetian tops most wheelchair accessible Las Vegas hotels lists due to the hotel staff's commitment to keeping their disabled guests happy and comfortable. Guests can also look forward to luxury rooms with ample space, including roll-in showers.



The Aria Resort and Casino pool.



The beautiful interior of TAO.

For those who are wanting a real "Venice, Paris" experience, the hotel's second-floor shopping and fine-dining options are just as convenient as their rooms. Wheelchair users can even enjoy a gondola ride through the indoor canal! It's quite an experience.

EXPLORING THE POOLS: During our trip, we took the time to explore some of the other MGM properties in Las Vegas by spending some time at their pools.

The Aria Resort and Casino (<https://aria.mgmresorts.com/en.html>) opened in December 2009.

This is a stunning AAA Five Diamond resort on The Strip featuring spectacular amenities, high-end service, premium meeting and convention space, striking architecture and sustainable design. Combined with its unparalleled offerings including the first-of-its-kind public Fine Art Collection, The Aria sets the bar for a new generation of resort experiences. ARIA is located within CityCenter.

As for their pool complex, it features the only ellipse-shaped pools in Las Vegas. For added privacy and amenities, guests can reserve one of a fleet of cabanas where Wi-Fi, shaded dining tables, and food and drink service are available. Visitors can also order poolside beverages and meals via the Breeze Café and Pool Bar, which features a wide menu of dishes and drinks. Of the 4,000 rooms, more than 100 at this resort are wheelchair accessible. Everything here is very level and flat to get around in a wheelchair. There are no steps leading to the lobby.

Probably the fastest- and definitely the cheapest – way to get around Vegas, the tram is perfect for both disabled and able-bodied travelers. The trams are completely free, so you can effortlessly move from one casino to the next without losing any of your spending money. There are lifts to access the tram stations, and a ride in the tram is designed to be comfortable and easy for travelers with disabilities. There are different tram lines, which each stop at various casinos and hotels, including the Aria. The other MGM pool that we had the plea-

sure of experiencing during our trip was the Mandalay Beach (<https://mandalaybay.mgmresorts.com/en/amenities/beach.html>), and we were truly blown away by what this property had to offer. The Mandalay Beach features an 11-acre tropical water environment, featuring more than 2,700 tons of sand, a signature 1.6-million-gallon wave pool, a lazy river, four swimming pools, a jogging track, as well as private gazebos, cabanas and beach bungalows. The open-air Beach Bar & Grill serves up American cuisine, such as sandwiches, wraps, adult beverages, and other beach favorites. Over the summer, you can also take in a concert series held on its outdoor stages, which overlooks the wave pool.

Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino is set on 120 lush acres featuring the Beach, The Mandalay Bay Events Center, award-winning restaurants, exhilarating entertainment, unique shopping, Shark Reef Aquarium and the recently expanded two-million-square-foot Mandalay Bay Convention Center. The resort offers three distinct hotel expe-



The exterior of the beachside casino at Mandalay Bay.

riences: Mandalay Bay with 3,211 luxurious rooms and suites reflecting a modern tropical ambiance; Four Seasons Hotel, a AAA Five Diamond hotel offering 424 rooms and suites; and the luxury all-suite Delano Las Vegas.

The hotel has a wheelchair lift that can be used in all their pools except the wave pool. They have luxurious suites with accessible features and roll-in showers. All the hotel elevators are more than large enough for a wheelchair. The resort is quite large and as such, the Bell Desk offers motorized scooter rentals to allow you to get around more easily.

Accessibility made possible at a NYC's MoMa

By Fay Schipper

The Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York City has given a lot of thought and attention to accessibility for all, making it enjoyable for a person with special needs to visit. This eight-floor museum (including two basement floors) located in the heart of midtown Manhattan is home to an impressive collection of modern and contemporary art – from Vincent van Gogh's *The Starry Night* and Pablo Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger* to cutting-edge photography, film, design and performance.

Even before stepping foot or rolling into the museum one gets a sense of feeling welcomed. Many of the NYC establishments do not yet offer the silver buttons that when pushed open doors or the sliding doors that automatically open when approached. MoMA is certainly a leader in making its museum and Education and Research Centre inviting to all.

Upon approaching the information/ticket counter, one notices an elegant black and silver five-by-four-inch sign with the logo of an ear. The sign instructs those with hearing devices to turn it to Telecoil T Mode, thus becoming an audio guide. Audio guides are available for free, or simply download the "MoMA, Museum of Modern Art" app. The museum has theatres and classrooms in the basement that are equipped with hearing loops. For elevator

access to the basement, ask for assistance at the information desk in the lobby area.

The museum offers several free services for people with special needs. Wheelchairs can be obtained in the coat check room. ASL interpreters are available for people who are Deaf or hard-of-hearing. Sculptures that are located on the second floor can be touched by people who are visually impaired, and if a blind person is visiting the museum alone, they can be guided around the museum by a volunteer. Those with low vision can receive documentation in large print. In order to receive any of these services, prior arrangements need to be made by calling the front desk during regular public hours at 718-784-2085. In addition, there are wheelchair accessible bathrooms located on floors 1, 2 and 3. It is no surprise that MoMA has won awards for its accessibility. In 2000, it won the Access Innovation in the Arts Award, presented by VSA Arts and MetLife Foundation, in recognition of its programs serving people with disabilities. In 2007, they received the Ruth Green Advocacy Award from the League for the Hard of Hearing.

An opportunity to visit a museum that welcomes you wholeheartedly and with compassion awaits you at the Museum of Modern Art (www.moma.org).



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David Birnbaum

Député de / MNA for D'Arcy-McGee

Porte-parole de l'opposition officielle
en matière d'affaires autochtones /
Official Opposition Critic for Indigenous Affairs

514-488-7028

David.Birnbaum.DMG@assnat.qc.ca



Marc Tanguay

Député de / MNA for LaFontaine

Leader parlementaire de l'opposition officielle /
Official Opposition House Leader

514-648-1007

Marc.tanguay-lafo@assnat.qc.ca



Gregory Kelley

Député de / MNA for Jacques-Cartier

Porte-parole de l'opposition officielle en matière de relations
avec les Québécois d'expression anglaise / Official Opposition
Critic for Relations with English-Speaking Quebecers
Porte-parole de l'opposition officielle en matière de forêts, de
faune et de parcs /

Official Opposition Critic for Forests, Wildlife and Parks

514-697-7663

Gregory.Kelley.JACA@assnat.qc.ca



Filomena Rotiroti

Députée de / MNA for Jeanne-Mance-Viger

Présidente du caucus de l'opposition officielle /
Chair of the Official Opposition Caucus

514-326-0491

Filomena.Rotiroti.JMV@assnat.qc.ca



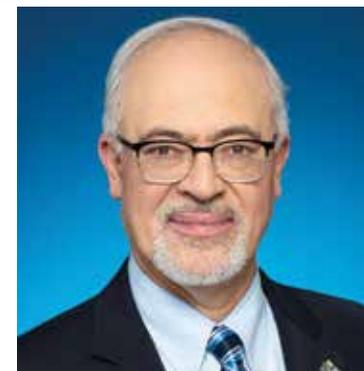
Enrico Ciccone

Député de / MNA for Marquette

Porte-parole de l'opposition officielle en matière de sports,
de loisirs et de saines habitudes de vie /
Official Opposition Critic for Sports,
Recreation and Healthy Living

514-634-9720

Enrico.Ciccone.MARQ@assnat.qc.ca



Carlos J. Leitão

Député de / MNA for Robert-Baldwin

Président de la Commission de l'administration publique,
Porte-parole de l'opposition officielle en matière de finances /
Chair of the Committee on Public Administration,
Official Opposition Critic for Finance

514-684-9000

CarlosJ.Leitao.ROBA@assnat.qc.ca



Kathleen Weil

Députée de / MNA for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce

Porte-parole de l'opposition officielle pour les ordres professionnels /
Official Opposition Critic for Professional Orders
Porte-parole de l'opposition officielle en matière de francophonie
canadienne /
Official Opposition Critic for the Canadian Francophonie

514-489-7581

Kathleen.Weil.NDDG@assnat.qc.ca



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