

# INSPIRATIONS

A Snapshot of Our Special Needs Community

Spring 2010

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## Bullying and the special needs student

By Lori Rubin

When Christopher's family moved to a larger house in a new neighbourhood, he had to change schools in the middle of Grade 4. For many children, changing schools in the middle of the academic year, can present some anxiety with respect to new adjustments and navigating an unfamiliar social world. But for children with special needs, the level of anxiety can often increase dramatically.

Two years ago, Christopher was diagnosed with Tourette's Syndrome, a disorder characterized by involuntary tics, vocalizations, and other associated learning challenges. Although controlled somewhat by medication, Christopher's facial and verbal tics are still apparent, especially during periods of stress. Christopher was feeling very anxious about going to a new school and as a result, his symptoms became more pronounced.

After the first few days of school, Christopher woke up every morning with different excuses as to why he could not go to school on that day. "I have a terrible headache!"; "The teacher is giving a math test today and we didn't cover that material in my old school!"; "I twisted my ankle in gym yesterday playing dodge ball and it hurts when I walk!" Each day, Christopher's mother coerced him into going to school, although she did agree to drive him as he absolutely refused to take the school bus. By week three, there was no improvement in Christopher's attitude and it was getting harder and harder for his mother to force him to go to school. One day, he came home from school with the pocket on his jacket torn and the money he brought for the book fair missing. When



Jay Jones-Doyle, who has cerebral palsy, is seen here with students from Willingdon Elementary School. He spoke recently at Willingdon, which is his former school. Read Doyle's compelling story on page 4.

she picked up the phone to call the principal, Christopher begged his mother not to call and divulged to her that he was being bullied. He explained (in tears) that a small group of boys, mostly lead by one "mean" boy, taunted and teased him, called him "Ticky" in front of the other kids, and imitated him whenever the teachers or lunch monitors weren't looking, especially on the school bus. He added that some of the girls and the quieter students in the class would stand by and giggle as the bullies made fun of him.

Christopher was a victim of bullying. The boys and girls that stood around and

watched or laughed are referred to as "bystanders," and through their inaction, often send the message to the bully that what he is doing is okay. Christopher did not have the confidence to speak out against this injustice, or to inform the authorities in the school (or even his own parents) of his ordeal. So he continued to suffer in silence until his mother discovered the truth.

It is important to note that not every conflict on the playground, nor every act of aggression, teasing or social exclusion, is a true representation of bullying. Bullying is a repeated pattern of behaviour that usually involves intimidation of another person.

Bullies look for signs of weakness in their "victims" that could involve social status, size, socio-economic status, ethnicity, or special needs. It is important for the adults in these children's lives to be on the lookout for the kinds of symptoms that Christopher was experiencing. There is nothing that can be done to "cure" his Tourette's Syndrome, but educating and sensitizing the peers in his new school about this disorder, would help them to understand what Christopher lives with every day. This, in turn, could greatly diminish the instances of bullying directed at him.

Bullying can have a devastating, lifelong effect on its victims. This can include depression, refusal to go to school or even leave the house, and in the extreme, thoughts of

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# Inspirational Notes



By Mike Cohen

In order to continue Canada's leadership in paralympic sport, the Foundation for the Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC) has been created to ensure ongoing success for our Canadian Paralympic Team.

Record breaking performances by Canadian Paralympians included: **Colette Bourgonje**, who won the first-ever Paralympic winter medal on Canadian soil; **Lauren Woolstencroft**, who swept the podium in Para-Alpine skiing, winning gold in all five disciplines; the McKeever brothers' victory in the 20-km cross-country ski race to take Canada's first gold at a home Games; and, Canada's second Paralympic gold in a row in wheelchair curling. These wins, and the performances of the entire 2010 Canadian Paralympic Team, captured the attention of the media and public across Canada, and have inspired a generation of Canadians with a disability to get involved in sports.

"Our goals for these Games were recognition, recruitment and investment, and we achieved all of those," said CPC chief executive officer, **Henry Storgaard**. "Thanks to the incredible performances of our athletes, and the unprecedented media and television



Canadian Paralympic goalie Benoît St-Amand and Olympic torchbearer Dr. Michel Elie visit a class at the Mackay Centre School.

coverage, public response to these Games has shown there is an interest in Paralympic sports. Our goal now is to work with our members, athletes, government and sponsors to keep the interest alive for the benefit of our paralympic athletes, as well as all Canadians with a disability."

The start of Canada's first Paralympic Winter Games was boosted by the announcement of \$10 million in funding to the CPC by the federal government. It ended with long term Canadian Paralympic Team sponsor Pfizer announcing its intention to extend its 14-year sponsorship for another five years, when its current agreement runs out after the London 2012 Paralympic Games.

**MACKAY OLYMPICS:** The Mackay Centre School in N.D.G., which educates children with motor, speech or sensorial difficulties, presented their own Olympic Week in February with opening ceremonies. This included a parade of nations with flags and national anthems, the reading of the Olympic oath, an artistic routine and a

slide show on athletes and different sports from the Centre's Rehabilitation team. An actual Olympic torch bearer, **Dr. Michel Elie**, was on hand to meet up with a group from Mackay carrying their own cauldrons. All students exited the gymnasium singing the Olympic theme song "I Believe." Later, Paralympic athlete **Benoît St-Amand** was on hand to visit classrooms. He is a goalie for the Canadian sledge hockey team. Students asked him many questions about the sport. He explained how he suffered from bone cancer as a teenager and had to have one of his legs amputated below the knee. Eight years later he began playing sledge hockey. St-Amand was a member of the 2006 Canadian Paralympic gold medal winning team in Turin, Italy. He brought the medal along to show the students and even suited up in his goalie uniform and let some students take shots on him.

**FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE:** What is it like to be a child with a disability? For many children with special needs, it's lonely. The Friendship Circle ([friendshipcircle.ca](http://friendshipcircle.ca)),

based in Montreal and Toronto, is changing this reality. The unique formula unites teen volunteers with special children in a friendship that deeply enriches both lives. Through a wide range of innovative programs and activities, the two share fun. Children with special needs experience the joy of friendship. Teenagers become empowered as their character grows through volunteering and parents enjoy the regular respite they need to recharge. Together, they form a very special circle of friendship. I recently got a tour of the organization's beautiful new Montreal headquarters, a former synagogue at the corner of Lavoie and Bourret. It is spacious and modern with all kinds of activity rooms. The best is yet to come as the \$8 million fundraising campaign will include the creation of Life Town, which will help youngsters develop important life skills.

**ROUND TABLE:** The Centre of Excellence for Speech and Language Development, coordinated by speech-language pathologist **Carol Jazzar**, recently hosted a full-day workshop and round table discussion exclusively for speech-language pathologists working in English school boards throughout Quebec. **Caroline Erdos** from the Montreal Children's Hospital gave a presentation on reading assessment and intervention for the speech-language pathologist.

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## Bullying

(Continued from page 1)

suicide. Bullies need to get the clear, consistent message that their actions will not be tolerated nor will they go unpunished. Children with special needs, more often than not, require the immediate and ongoing intervention and support from school personnel and family members, not only to prevent them from living in fear, but also to provide them with the tools and teach them the skills that they need to find their voice and make themselves heard. Every child deserves a safe, healthy school environment, and we all need to contribute to making that a reality.

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



# Stopping assault in its tracks: The Adapt Program

By Andrea Di Tomaso

At some point in our lives we have come face-to-face with abuse or aggression. It could have been a school bully, family member, or complete stranger on the sidewalk. We may look back later on and ask ourselves if we handled the situation correctly, "Did I walk away feeling safe and confident? Or did I walk away feeling scared and uncertain?"

Violence will never go away. We must learn to recognize dangerous situations for what they are and develop the skills to avoid or prevent them and, if necessary, even defend ourselves.

This is especially true for adults and children with special needs. The need can be even greater because individuals may have a more difficult time communicating to their parents or teachers if they have been the victim of physical or sexual assault. In general, instances of abuse in the special needs population is higher than that of the rest of the population.

David Singleton is one of the founders, and coordinator of the Adapt Program, and has worked for the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre (MAPC) for 25 years. In 1989, Tom Smith, a social worker at the West Island Re-adaptation Centre, recognized the need for a specialized program for the special needs community. He subsequently contacted David and asked him to develop a program for his group of special needs adults. When David asked him what he should teach, Tom simply replied, "Just treat them like everyone else."

Adapt teaches children and adults, as well as their support network, how to recognize and handle the challenges of encountering a potential assault situation. They also learn about their right to defend themselves from harm and the various techniques to do so. The structure is flexible and can be changed to meet the specific needs of any community.

"Working with Adapt groups is always a breath of fresh air," explains David. "It is amazing to see how supportive they are of each other."

Animators work with participants using role playing and discussion. The goal of the



*The goal of the Adapt Program is to empower participants.*

program is to empower the participants and build up confidence by encouraging them to make their own choices in everyday life.

Talking about assault helps people learn to speak out and share experiences that they may have kept to themselves for a long time. During the first session, a man with Down's Syndrome had fallen asleep in his chair. David shrugged it off as his being tired or disinterested, and continued on with the rest of the group. After the session ended, that same man took hold of David's arm and took him aside, explaining his encounter with an abusive taxi driver not long before.

"We try to get everyone involved," says David. "In a safe environment, people with special needs can learn to assert themselves. The (Adapt) program can help change his or her sense of self."

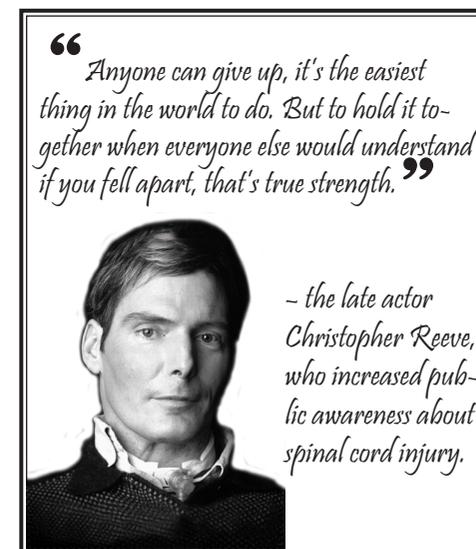
MAPC also offers adult workshops to teach parents and guardians on the dynamics of assault, how to reduce vulnerability and respond to people in difficulty. Caregivers can help adults and children with special needs make decisions for themselves, and discuss the prevention of abuse at non-threatening moments.

"Parents need to learn to make a leap of faith and trust that their children will know

what to do," says David.

The Adapt program has been successfully taught to over 600 children, teens and adults at many schools and hospitals such as the Douglas Hospital, the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre, École Secondaire Georges Vanier, Summit, John Grant High School and the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf.

For more information on the Adapt Program and other programs offered by the Montreal Assault Prevention Centre, you can contact them at (514) 284-1212.



## INSPIRATIONS

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## My story of life with Cerebral Palsy

By Jay Jones-Doyle

At 27, completing a Master's of Science in Marketing at Concordia's John Molson School of Business, the proud father of a vibrant and active young five year old attending Willingdon – which happens to be my old elementary school... it's interesting how things turn out for the best.

When I first set foot in Willingdon as a child I did so in a more metaphoric sense than most: I could barely walk and I could not do stairs. I had been born with Cerebral Palsy and was initially immobile from the neck down. The doctors told my parents to 'accept their child' and to not push me 'be-

beyond my limits' as it was unfair to me. My mother decided that this simply would not do and that she was going to devise a new method of treating me based on a simple hypothesis: there was nothing structurally wrong with my brain or spine, and therefore the issue lay in under-developed neuron pathways – essentially the signal to move my hand was being generated but was not getting to my limbs. She suspected that the problem was akin to someone trying to play a complicated sport that they'd never played before, only this sport was supposed to come naturally and it wasn't. Her solution was to do the motions for me and, if she did them enough, eventually my brain would learn how to make me use my limbs. She massaged every finger and toe, and mimicked walking motions 1,000 times a day for over eight months without a single sign of success... but slowly I started to make progress. At every step of the way doctors tried to tell my parents to accept me and that I would never walk, write with a pencil, attend regular school, etc. So much for professional foresight...

As previously mentioned, when I first began at Willingdon I could barely walk... but seeing all of the other kids running about gave me the desire to do the same. I quickly focussed my efforts, tackled that

hurdle, and have not slowed down since. I studied psychology and business during my undergraduate studies at Concordia, I am a championship-winning Junior hockey coach with NDG, am an international motivational speaker, a web-designer, co-organized the



Jay Jones-Doyle, his son Ben and his former teacher Anne Meilleur.

2010 JMSB delegation to the National MBA Games in Quebec City, sat on the advisory committee that selected Concordia's new Dean of Graduate studies, and have most recently won the presidency of the Commerce Graduate Student Association (CGSA) for the 2010 – 2011 term – a position never before occupied by a non-MBA student. Oh, and I'm on the board of editors for this publication :)

It's interesting. I've been asked many times whether I would make my disability disappear if I could. Looking back at the path I've taken it's hard not to wonder whether life would have been better without it, but the answer I always seem to come back to is "not really." We all have aspects of our lives that can either be viewed in a positive or negative light, and as the old saying goes: "Life is 1/10th what happens to you, and 9/10ths what you do about it." The choice to be positive, outgoing, and happy has led me to the place I am today, and if anything, having a disability has differentiated me from my peers. What I do with that differentiation, however, defines the outcome... and so I will continue to be myself – it seems to have paid off so far.

## Concordia looks out for special needs students

By Jay Jones-Doyle

In today's day and age, a university degree is like a high school degree was 40 years ago – the bare minimum needed to start a career and build a future. As such, deciding to pursue higher education can be a big decision, one potentially even more daunting for an individual with a disability. For individuals in need of educational accommodation, part of the decision of where to apply lies in what services the university offers.

Concordia University's Access Center for Students with Disabilities (ACSD) accommodates individuals with a wide variety of needs spanning the spectrum of the physical and learning disability realms. Dr. Leo Bissonnette, coordinator of Concordia's ACSD, states that when a new student contacts the center, a meeting is arranged where they are met by an advisor and a file is opened. Even if their disability is visually identifiable, medical documentation specifying the type and scope of disability is required for the student to be eligible for the ACSD's services. This documentation helps the ACSD tailor specific accommodations to the student as opposed to employing a "buffet style approach to accommodation." By accommodating according on the basis of their specific needs, students are given the opportunity to excel at the university level while remaining as self-sufficient as possible.

Another significant aspect of the ACSD's role is to help students develop a stronger and better-rounded self-concept, while learning to advocate for themselves by focusing on their positives (what they can do) as opposed to their negatives (their limitations). This process of gradually shifting from dependence to independence to interdependence is what Dr. Bissonnette refers to as "the Human Development Model," and is central to how the ACSD envisions the progression of each student (depending on their capabilities). This transition is fundamental to successfully integrating into the workforce and society at large, and needs to start (and be encouraged) at home.

The ACSD also has a database of governmental programs, bursaries, and scholarships that are in place to help students with disabilities during (and after) their education. For example, through the ACSD, students can apply for a provincial bursary of up to \$2,000 towards a computer, and other funds are available for a variety of other accommodations.

For more information on the services offered by Concordia's Access Center for Students with Disabilities, please see <http://supportservices.concordia.ca/disabilities>.

Jay Jones-Doyle has cerebral palsy. He is pursuing his Master's of Science Degree in Marketing at Concordia's John Molson School of Business.





# CTV researcher shares his experience with visually impaired students

By: Mike Cohen

For the past decade, in my capacity as communications and marketing specialist for the English Montreal School Board (EMSB), I have maintained regular contact with Peter Schiavi. As a producer and researcher for CTV News in Montreal, Peter calls and meets with me often to ensure he is up to speed on the various issues of the day.

Imagine my surprise when I called Peter about a year ago to tell him about an event I was organizing at the Montreal Association for the Blind (MAB) and learned that he was visually impaired. "I have been legally blind most of my life," Peter confided.

Peter does not walk with a white cane, nor does he wear glasses or squint when he sees you come closer. He is a sharp looking gentleman who can always be found on his cell phone or the computer. When he would meet me at the elevator to bring me to the newsroom there was no hint that he was really following my voice, not my physical movements.

"I am able to continue to pursue my career at CTV because of the Montreal Association for the Blind," Peter explained. "They taught me how to cope with my condition."

Peter has Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy (LHON), also known as Leber's Optic Atrophy (LOA), Leber's Optic Neuropathy (LON) or Leber's Disease. It is often referred to as just Leber's for short.

This is a rare condition which can cause loss of central vision. It usually affects men, most commonly in the late twenties or early thirties, but the symptoms can happen at any age, to men or women.

This disease was first described by Theodore Leber in the 19th century, but we only really started to understand the inheritance and cause of Leber's in the late 1980's.

When I asked Peter if he would come speak to students at the Philip E. Layton School for the Blind, located at the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre in N.D.G., he agreed without hesitation.

"I was 21 when I woke up one morning with blurred vision in one eye," Peter told a group of very interested visually impaired students. "Frankly I thought I needed glass-



Peter Schiavi presents students from the Philip E. Layton School for the Blind with CTV caps.

es so I made an appointment with an optometrist. They could not see me right away and while I waited the other eye started to go. I went to see a doctor who did an exam and I was diagnosed."

Usually Leber's affects one eye first, so central vision is lost in that eye over a period of a few weeks. One or two months later, the second eye is affected in the same way. The time when someone is losing their eyesight is often called the 'acute' period. After a few more weeks, the eyesight stops getting worse.

## A Genetic Condition

Leber's is a genetic condition, that is, it is passed down through the family. Not everyone in a family affected by Leber's will lose their eyesight, and there is no way to tell who will get symptoms. "My nephew recently got diagnosed," Peter told the students. "He is only 16 years old. I tried to tell him what I say to everyone else. For the first six months it is like the end of the world. You can't read or cross the street. You are thinking like a person who cannot see. But eventually you learn to adapt. I guess in a lot of ways I am one of the fortunate ones. With the help of a device that magnifies images, called a monocular, and very large fonts on my computer screen, I am able to visualize certain things. When I look straight ahead at someone, they are blurry. The closer I get though I am able to use peripheral vision." Peter told the students how grateful he is

to the MAB. "They taught me how to use monoculars, how to use a computer and type and basically how to find a job," he says. "My first job was mixing cement. But media would end up being my calling, thanks to the MAB."

The MAB had launched a job training program and despite his visual impairment Peter got some work at The Weather Network. "I was working a 12 hour shift with hand held monocular and doing data entry," he explained. "Sure, I was a bit slower than the others. I had to hold the monocular with one hand and type with the other. It was tiring work, especially for my shoulder."

A year later CTV (then known as CFCF) came calling. They were looking for someone to answer phone calls for a current affairs program called Fighting Back, hosted by Terry DiMonte and help arrange interviews. From there he got hired as a researcher for a show called Hockey World. "I remember when the boss told the show's producer," he said. "He told him 'I have good news and bad news. The good news is you have that researcher you want. The bad news is that he is legally blind, but he really knows his sport.' The job really worked out nicely."

When Hockey World was cancelled, Peter found a spot working for the CFCF morning show and then moved to news, where he has been ever since. In between he also produced two other sports programs.

Peter's visit to the MAB indeed inspired the students, many of whom confided to him later that they too might want to work in broadcasting one day. "If he can do it so can I," said one young man.

As a follow up, Peter invited the students and their teachers for a tour of the CTV Montreal studios.

"The kids really appreciated Peter's story," commented Principal Patrizia Ciccarelli. "He is a perfect example that whatever they are interested in to pursue in life they should give it every effort they can. As Peter told us, visually impaired individuals want to work for a living and contribute to society, and that they do."

We do know that Leber's is inherited through a gene which is only passed on through the egg cell from the mother. Men cannot pass on Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy to their children.

Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy is linked to a number of genes, all in the DNA of structures called Mitochondria. These provide energy to the cells of the body. We believe that the particular gene changes linked to Leber's Hereditary Optic Neuropathy lower the amount of energy available to the cells of the optic nerve and retina. These cells are damaged and can even die because of this lack of energy. The damage to the optic nerve and retina is what causes the symptoms of Leber's.

## What is a monocular?

Peter Schiavi credits the use of a monocular with allowing him to read.

A monocular is a modified refracting telescope used to magnify the images of distant objects by passing light through a series of lenses and sometimes prisms; the use of prisms results in a lightweight telescope. Volume and weight are less than half those of binoculars of similar optical properties, making it easy to carry. Monoculars produce two-dimensional images, while binoculars add perception of depth (three dimensions).

A monocular with a straight optical path is relatively long; prisms can be used to fold the optical path to make an instrument which is much shorter (see the article on binoculars for details).

Monoculars, sometimes called telescopes when used in this capacity, are used wherever a magnified two-dimensional image of a distant object is required.



# Study focuses on success of CEGEP students with disabilities

By Catherine S. Fichten, Jennison Asuncion, Maria Barile, Shirley Jorgensen and Alice Havel

The Adaptech Research Network of Dawson College, McGill University, the Jewish General Hospital, the Center for the Study of Learning and Performance and the Lady Davis Research Institute have been studying issues of relevance to Canadian college and university students with all types of visible and non-visible disabilities since 1996. Here we want to highlight some of our findings that will be of interest to everyone who would like to see students with disabilities succeed.

One of our key findings indicates that once they enter CEGEP, students with and without disabilities graduate at the same rate. The only difference is that students with disabilities take one extra semester. We also found that students with disabilities, when they received needed accommodations, got good grades. For example, our data indicates that the first semester grades of students with learning disabilities did not differ from those of non-disabled students, while the grades of students with other disabilities (e.g., mobility, sensory, psychiatric, medical) were significantly higher than those of their nondisabled peers. We also found, in a relatively small sample of CEGEP students with disabilities who graduated from three year career/technical programs, that the rates of employment of graduates with and

without disabilities were comparable.

Several of our studies have to do with computer technologies that can help students at school. Concerns noted by students in this realm include the high cost of adaptive software (e.g., software that reads what is on the screen) and hardware (e.g., an adapted mouse), not knowing what potentially helpful technologies are out there, where to buy these, and whether these technologies can help the student succeed. In response to these concerns we have gathered a list of free and/or inexpensive (\$200 or less) hardware and software alternatives that might be useful. Some are long-running demos, while others are fully functional. These are not meant to replace the higher end hardware and software currently on the market. However, as a short-term solution, or for the purposes of trying out different specialized technologies, we think they are a good place to start. You can check these out, and view brief videos of some of our favorites, on our bilingual web page at [www.adaptech.org](http://www.adaptech.org).

In another study we looked at those areas that help or cause problems for college students with disabilities. We found that what was most helpful was being able to enroll with the school's services for students with disabilities. Among accommodations students may be eligible to receive by signing up for disability related services are: additional time for exams, preferential timetables, note takers, and alternate format materials for students with print impairments.

a discussion of their new school, its name, drive by it, and discuss starting school in general (there are several children's books on this topic). The next important step is to visit the new school and meet the teachers before the school year begins. A scrapbook of this visit can be created using pictures of the school building from the front and back, the schoolyard, classroom, locker area, hallways, as well as important individuals (e.g., teachers, principal, and secretary but obtain permission before). Review this scrapbook over the summer to keep the experience fresh in your child's mind. You may also include a copy of the school's schedule to review and adjust your child's sleeping routine accordingly. Being rested when he or she starts school can have a significant impact on his/her school experience.

## Prepare the school

Meeting and sharing relevant information is critical. A meeting should be



The Adaptech Research Network study is inspirational to those who wish to see students with disabilities succeed.

One of our studies showed that graduates with disabilities who registered with their school to receive disability related accommodations reported significantly more helpful aspects, and fewer obstacles, than graduates with disabilities who did not do so. It is important to note that accommodations in high school and at college can be dramatically different, as several studies show that services for students with disabilities at the post-secondary level tend to be more extensive than those at high school.

We are very optimistic about what happens once students enter the post-secondary system. But our data also show that when it comes to the number of students with disabilities in colleges and universities, Quebec lags behind the other provinces. As

a result, we would like to see more high school graduates with disabilities enroll in college.

We believe that policy-makers need research to allow them to make sound decisions. It is in this spirit that we want to tell you about our current research: "Study on the Postsecondary Education Experience of Persons with Disabilities in Canada." It is carried out by researchers at Dawson College and McGill University. The purpose is to identify

environmental, financial, personal and other factors that help or that pose barriers to students with disabilities pursuing higher education in Canada. We are also interested in the transition to employment.

If you want to know more about our findings, our listing of free and inexpensive computer and information technologies, or about our ongoing research, visit our web site at [www.adaptech.com](http://www.adaptech.com).

Catherine S. Fichten, Maria Barile and Jennison Asuncion are co-directors of the Adaptech Research Network. Shirley Jorgensen works in Institutional Research at Dawson College while Alice Havel works in Services for Students with Disabilities at Dawson.

## Prepare yourself

As parents, we spend so much time worrying about everything we need to do for our children, especially if they have special needs, and allowing someone else to take charge is often very difficult. Being open and allowing your children to experience a regular school, including going on a bus and school trips is a vital component in learning. As scary as it might be to you as a parent, it is usually an exciting event for a child that he or she can accomplish. Remember, elementary school is an opportunity for your child to learn and to develop self-sufficiency skills that can help build self-confidence. Cherish every accomplishment your child makes along this journey—whether large or small.

Despina Vassiliou is an English Montreal School Board psychologist.

## Preparing to integrate your child in a regular kindergarten

By Despina Vassiliou, Ph.D.

*It is time to think about elementary school and your child has special needs to be addressed. Where do you begin?*

### Prepare your child

Children can become unsettled with starting at a new school, particularly for those with autism, and they need help to alleviate some of their worries. Begin with



# Everyone benefits from collaborative instruction at the secondary level

By Susan Waite

As the only speech-language pathologist (SLP) assigned to the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) high schools, I am a sparse resource. This requires innovation in my service delivery practices.

Last year, English Language Arts teachers at Perspectives II Alternative High School in St. Michel, Ruwani Payoe and Heather Morrison, requested that I initiate a collaborative project with them in their classrooms. Perspectives II is a secondary school for students who are at risk of dropping out. Classes are smaller and therefore teachers can provide more individualized attention.

The project has consisted of a team effort in administering a Learning and Evaluation Situation examination and co-teaching one English Language Arts period per week. The classroom teacher is in charge of delivering the curriculum. My role is to provide the teacher with information, materials, strategies and techniques that maximize student performance. This requires my physical presence in the classroom and co-teaching to uncover student strengths and challenges. I also review student work and evaluation reports with the classroom teacher to develop individualized goals and



*The aim of this study has been to maximize student performances.*

demystify language difficulties as needed. The teacher and I evaluate our practices and student progress on an ongoing basis.

Have the teachers and students benefited? Ms. Payoe reports that the project has "helped weaker students write in a more focused way." She has learned new cueing and scaffolding techniques and more effective

use of graphic organizers. She has "begun to understand that inclusive, interactive classroom discussion doesn't always transfer to equally engaging written responses" in the absence of instructional strategies that target specific writing skills. Ms. Morrison indicates that working together, collaboratively, has allowed us to engage in pertinent discussions about cognitive processes and "makes our discussions about students

learning real-not just theoretical."

Ms. Morrison says that she is particularly happy about our latest initiative to get students involved in creating their own learning objectives. "I can't wait to see the results!" she says. The students, likewise, expressed appreciation at having the opportunity to identify their own academic goals with their teacher and SLP. Ms. Morrison created this initiative from materials I had shared with her. This last point illustrates clearly the notion that two heads are better than one!

Finally, what are the advantages to me as a school SLP? Firstly, I get the opportunity to evaluate students in a real life context, which permits me to generate recommendations that are authentic and relevant. Secondly, I can assess whether or not a material or technique is actually beneficial and adapt it if necessary. Most importantly, I have learned about classroom instructional strategies and materials that are consistent with the development of oral and written competencies. This results in language intervention that is more in line with curriculum requirements.

*Susan Waite is a Speech-Language Pathologist at the English Montreal School Board.*

## Up to date special needs database

The updated Inspirations special needs database is available online at [www.emsb.qc.ca/inspirations](http://www.emsb.qc.ca/inspirations), listing over 350 resources in and around the city of Montreal for children and young adults. Within its pages, you will find services for all special needs, including Autism Spectrum Disorders, Down Syndrome, ADHD, learning disabilities, behavioral difficulties, hearing and visual impairments. The table of contents will guide you through various therapeutic, counselling and support services from recreational activities, tutoring and vocational services, medical clinics, rehabilitation, adaptation and social integration, to resources for parents and professionals (such as associations and government organizations), camps, respite care, physical aid resources and other helpful information.

The database, compiled to fulfill a need voiced by both parents and professionals, provides pertinent information for each list-

ing such as phone numbers, links to email and website addresses, and a brief description of the service offered. This database is intended to be used as a guide. The English Montreal School Board recommends that you research these resources to determine if they are appropriate for the care of your child or young adult. If you would like to recommend a resource for this list, please contact [inspirations@emsb.qc.ca](mailto:inspirations@emsb.qc.ca).

-Wendy Singer



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**The publishers wish to thank Mr. Tomassi for supporting the work of Inspirations !**





## Work-study programs offer a myriad of opportunities to students with learning disabilities

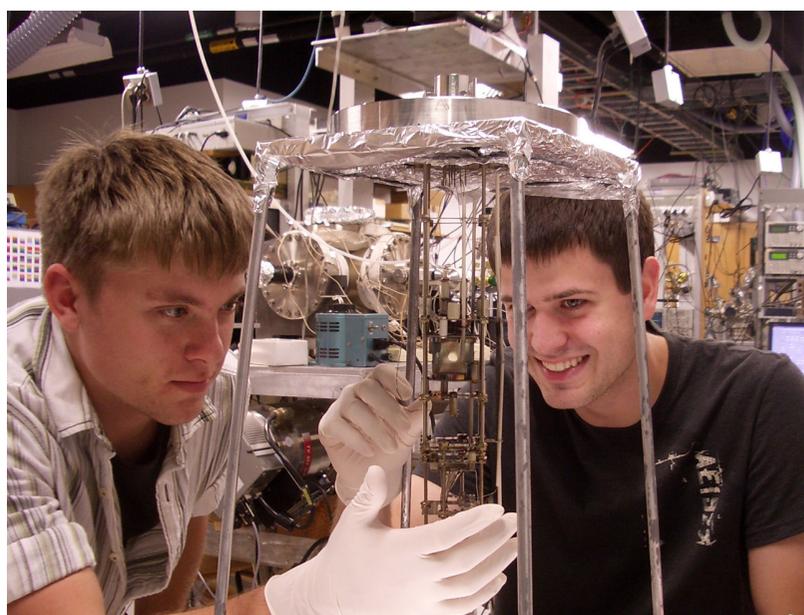
By Daniela Scoppa

Navigating the job scene can prove to be sometimes difficult and it requires a certain skill set to be able to get a job and keep it. The Lester B. Pearson School Board (LBPSB) and the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) both offer work-study programs to students with learning disabilities to help them learn the skills required to obtain a job and keep it.

The work-study programs offered at both school boards have the same objectives for their students once they finish the program: independence and autonomy. "The main goal of this program is to not only teach students necessary skills for a job but to also teach them life skills," said Andrea Bertalan, a work skills consultant at the LBPSB.

For students currently in high school, the LBPSB integrates work-study into the student's curriculum and it is treated like any other subject such as English, French or Math. Depending on the degree of the student's learning difficulties, students are taught different skills to do different jobs, either in school or outside school. Bertalan has created many partnerships that bring businesses into the school setting. "We have students who work in grocery stores, pet stores, libraries, hair salons and warehouses," Bertalan said. "We also have students who work in their schools for different companies doing work such as packaging, assembling, sorting and portioning."

The LBPSB also has an integration aid who accompany students to their jobs outside of



Work-study programs teach life skills.

the school. The aid will be active in helping the students when they first start a job, but will then step back and let the students take over as they become more comfortable with the tasks required. "We had a student who had a job bagging groceries," recounts Bertalan. "The student had been doing this job for five months and then dropped a jar of peanut butter while bagging someone's groceries. The student panicked but the integration aid, who was supervising from afar, intervened and explained to the student that it was okay and sometimes these things happen."

The EMSB offers similar programs for its

students at John Grant High School in Côte Saint-Luc and at Paul VI High School in Ahuntsic. John Grant also provides a job orientation program for 17 to 21-year-olds, which allows students with learning difficulties to return to the

school after Grade 11 to receive more job training. Students in the job orientation program work three days in the community and spend the other two days in the classroom learning life skills. "Students will learn how to budget their money, how to use a map, how to write a CV, what to expect in an interview and how to use a computer among many other things," explains Dorothy Shaw, a career advisor at John Grant.

Students at both school boards also receive travel training, learning how to use public transit in order to get themselves to their jobs, which is a big focus in the work study

programs. "Everything they learn in the work-study program can be applied once they leave school," said Bertalan. "It fosters self-confidence and independence."

Both Bertalan and Shaw agree that the students learn a variety of responsibilities needed to not only keep a job but to function in society. Punctuality, respect for others, working in teams, following instructions, and asking for help are all traits the students learn and take away after their experience in the work-study program. "To be able to go out and do a job and make a difference really improves the students' self-esteem," said Shaw. "You see a big difference in the students once they leave the program. They are very motivated and have a sense of autonomy."

Throughout the program, the students will try a variety of different jobs, which are unpaid stages, to gain experience in different settings. The program generally lasts a full school year. The students are not without their challenges, however, and some are resistant to being away from their peers or become very nervous when being interviewed for a job. But according to Bertalan and Shaw, once the students start their jobs they become very excited about working and look forward to it. "The students love having this opportunity," said Bertalan. "The feel like they're doing something positive."

Daniela Scoppa is the communications officer for the Lester B. Pearson School Board.

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# Slow and steady: RAPID making inroads on the South Shore

By Daniel Smajovits



A happy student from RAPID.

For decades, special-needs anglophone families in the South Shore were constantly fighting battles. Whether it was rush-hour traffic to bring their children into Montreal for services or the lack of community support in their own backyard, parents realized something needed to change.

Fueled in part by their frustration, but more so by their love for their children, parents joined together and did the only thing they could and that was establish their own organization. Their efforts gave birth to Resources for the Anglophone Population with Intellectual Disabilities, or "RAPID." Over the course of the past three years, it has not

only begun to fill a void, but change lives.

"I find that each family feels isolated (having a special needs child). When you have a child that tends to act out, you tend not to go into a public situation where not everybody understands your child," said Carole Briggs-Carlone, the mother of a 15-year old special needs child. "If you can have an activity (or a place) where you can take your child, you're going to be more comfortable because people understand where you're coming from."

While the lack of resources was a problem, it was the alienation felt amongst the anglophone community which was then, and still remains a driving force behind the organization. "Parents (were fed up)," said Debbie Horrocks, director of the South Shore CEDEC (Community Economic Development and Employability Committees), "There were no resources available for anglophones, so the parents really came together to do something because their kids have the rights to services also."

"Being an anglophone in a mostly francophone society makes it very difficult to find services in English," added Briggs-Carlone. It's a double challenge."

Although RAPID has grown steadily, it has not been easy. Horrocks realizes that there is a much greater demand for their services. However, most parents in the area do not even know they exist.

"We do not have money for advertising so our resources are spread by word of mouth," said Horrocks. "The [Riverside] School Board has now come on board and helps us reach some parents with special needs children. That's starting to help. We held our first fundraiser in the fall, and word is starting to get out there."

"It's never been an easy process," she added. "It's often difficult to find our clientele. We put the services out there, but getting in touch with the clientele has been hard because we're pretty much a new organization."

Even with its growing pains, the success of RAPID thus far signals a new era for special needs families on the South Shore, and for Briggs-Carlone, it cannot come soon enough. While for the past 10 years her daughter has travelled daily from their home in Chateaugay to Saint-Lambert to attend REACH, she is excited by the possibility that RAPID can one day make inroads closer to home.

"I am hoping that we will be able to bridge the gap from Saint-Lambert to Chateaugay eventually because there are intellectually handicapped people in Chateaugay whom are looking for services in English also," she said. "I would like for it to be expanded to encompass the whole South Shore so we can have different places so people from my area will not have to travel so far for services."

Although it might be a few years until RAPID can expand, it has been this forward thinking and the possibility of new opportunities which has excited parents. In addition to a summer camp that has grown from one week to between four and six this summer, Horrocks hopes RAPID will soon be able to offer occupational therapy, speech therapists and even babysitting classes to teach young people how to take care of special needs children.

"We still have a ways to go, it's not easy to establish a new organization so we have a lot of work ahead of us, but we have a tremendously committed group of parents and volunteers who want to see this succeed and only want the best for the community," she said. "As we move forward, we're finding ways to offer resources to the families."

Yet, for parents, the mere existence of RAPID provides hope, not only for the growing population of children with special needs, but for efforts to sensitize the community as a whole.

"Special needs children want to be accepted just as much as everyone else," said Briggs-Carlone. "It would be nice to see a reverse integration where the kids can be sensitized to having special needs children around them and get to know them.[One day] we can have a reverse integration where you can bring in regular kids (to interact with) special needs children because they're going to be living in society with special needs people when they're adults."

## Dynamic Theatre Factory takes its "Hatz Off"

By Wendy Singer

In the winter edition of Inspirations, we highlighted Dynamic Theatre Factory's (DTF) B.E.T.T.E.R. Esteem Program (Better Behavioral Enhancement Through Theatrical Expression and Release) for children aged six to 12 with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), learning disabilities, extreme shyness, and Pervasive Development Disorder (PDD), high functioning Autism or Asperger's.

On April 16, nine students from St. Gabriel Elementary School in Point St. Charles performed Teachers Troubles to rave reviews. Ranging in age from seven to 12, these students have various behavioral issues, from learning disabilities to ADHD and ADD. Director Anik Matern shares insight into the process. "This has by far been the most

challenging group we've ever encountered," she said. "Just getting them to focus was our main and constant focus. But by week seven, they started pulling together as a team. This transition was most inspirational to see. There has been immense individual and group progress."

Teachers Troubles, with original text and music created by the children, focuses on their daily challenges, from home and school to the neighborhood and authority figures. Dealing with complex situations, teachers often bear the brunt of their frustrations. Eloquently acted, the storyline ends with a positive twist as they realize that life is not easy for teachers either, and they're not so bad after all.

After the show, DTF inaugurated the Hatz



Winner Austin McKernan is congratulated by Anik Matern and Claire Jacques.

Off Award of Merit to honour the memory of Catherine Hatzivas, who passed away suddenly last summer. Catherine was a strong supporter and advocate of the The B.E.T.T.E.R. Esteem Program after seeing her son flourish under its direction. The first Hatz Off award was presented to Austin

McKernan. The judges based their criteria on behavioral, social and academic enhancement throughout the 14 weeks, helping and encouraging other group members, setting a good example, enthusiasm for learning and expressing themselves.

Look out for DTF's documentary about their program and the making of Teachers Troubles. A four-week B.E.T.T.E.R. Esteem experience, with 15 special needs children, will take place at Vanguard Elementary School in June. Grateful to The Foundation of Greater Montreal for funding, Matern states, "No matter what the special need is, every child needs a chance to feel they can accomplish something. Finding a sense of self-esteem provides a win-win situation."

To reach Dynamic Theater Factory call (514) 591-6994, info@dtfonline.com or log on to www.dtfonline.com.



## Dream, imagine and achieve at the Action Centre

By Wendy Singer

Behind the doors of 2214 Dollard Avenue in LaSalle lies a world filled with activity, smiles and sincerity. The Action Centre offers bilingual services to people with physical and/or mild cognitive disabilities. It all began in 1998 with a group of “graduates” from the Constance-Lethbridge Rehabilitation Centre who virtually had nowhere to go but shopping malls.

On a visit to the Centre, the buzz of activity is palpable. A cooking class focuses on making tailor made pizzas while incorporating safe cooking habits. An art teacher taps into the members’ exquisite painting talents. A computer session with 18 students includes Jeffrey, who has four undergraduate degrees and is preparing Action Reaction, the Centre’s newsletter. The daily schedule includes a plethora of activities while the member-driven Social Club organizes outings such as bowling and visits to the Old Port. Included in the hustle and bustle are nursing students from CDI College, a student studying special needs at CEGEP du Vieux Montréal, a chef, staff members and volunteers.

Chairman of the Board Ginger Petty, a most dynamic and dedicated leader, is committed to creating a board of directors consisting of lay people and members. You’ve probably heard of their “Chair Aware Chal-



Action Centre member Charlie and Scruffy, the Centre’s mascot (rescued from a shelter).

lenge” where participants spend one day in a wheelchair. This year, they’re gearing

up for a wheelchair basketball tournament at McGill University on May 29. Between 20 and 30 teams will be assembled (including CJAD and Global Media) to raise funds for the physically challenged while experiencing sports in a wheelchair.

The Action Centre’s 170 members are involved at all levels of the organization from fundraising to awareness. Look out for their ‘You are loved’ cards, explaining their mission to provide physically challenged Montrealers with the opportu-

nity to dream, imagine and achieve.

Two members, Cara and Cindy, recently created a slogan to display at the Centre’s exits: ‘Become a member; become a friend; you’ll have a family.’ Sadly, 37 year-old Cara passed away before the signs were completed, yet her memory will live on through them. Member Harriet Sandell was a teacher with the Riverside School Board until she suffered two strokes. A friendly, warm, 61 year-old, Harriet has been a regular at the Centre since 1999 and recently joined the board of directors. When asked what she values about the Centre, her views reflect those of Cara and Cindy, “I have made lots of new friends. It’s a place to call home. I’m so happy to come here.”

Petty succinctly explains the heart of the Action Centre. “There is a happiness about our members,” she said. “They never complain. They have hope and are courageous. They’ve been through so much and deserve a great life. We love to see them smile.”

For information about the Action Centre or their basketball tournament, contact Ginger at [gingerpetty1@hotmail.com](mailto:gingerpetty1@hotmail.com). Visit their website at [www.centreaction.org](http://www.centreaction.org).

## Making Purim count a little more: JPPS and the JEM workshop

By David Smajovits

The mutual giving of food and drink in baskets called mishloach manot is a time-honoured Purim tradition. Celebrating the Jewish festival of Purim is simply incomplete without feasting on a hamentashen, or two, or three. But imagine having the power to satisfy someone’s sweet tooth while simultaneously supporting the vital work that the JEM Workshop does in the community?

The year 2010 marked the fourth consecutive year that the Jewish People’s and Peretz Schools (JPPS) and the Jewish Education Montreal (JEM) workshop collaborated on a project that not only yielded tangible proceeds that directly supported both organizations, but perhaps more importantly, also sensitized our young generation to intellectually handicapped members of our community.

“This initiative was an incredible win-win situation for everyone involved. Little wonder why it’s been so successful in previous years,” explained project coordinator Dr. Judy Hagshi. “With the fundraising side being so productive, it’s sometimes easy to lose sight of the cooperation that takes place between the students and the workers. To me,



The program sensitized a young generation of students to the lives of the intellectually handicapped.

that’s the most wonderful part of the program.”

For the past 55 years, the JEM workshop (Formerly the Jewish Vocational Services Workshop) has been a special resource for the Montreal Jewish community. Currently employing 84 intellectually handicapped adults living with a wide range of challenges, they provide their employees with the opportunity to earn a fair wage and to gain the genuine sense of accomplishment associated with a hard day’s work. The fully appointed kosher and peanut-free Purim basket, sold for just \$10 and contained hamentashen, a chocolate bar, a bottle of grape juice, a Purim mask, and a grager (noisemaker), and was but one of the many items that are assembled at the workshop. JPPS Grade 4 classes visited the workshop throughout the week of January 25 to make the baskets.



## A very happy day for a special young man

By Carol Maker

Mark is a young man of 44 who has spent every second or third weekend with me for the past 25 years. Mark is both physically and intellectually handicapped, but nevertheless a very intelligent person. Sadly, his mother passed away six years ago.

I could tell you many delightful stories about Mark, however, the one that will always remain in my heart is the day of his brother's wedding. Personally, I thought it was the happiest day of his life. Unknown to his family, I had him outfitted for a tuxedo (the same one his father would wear) and, of course, a boutonniere. We showed up at the church slightly early and, oh my goodness, the reaction when everyone saw Mark was sensational. His brother (the groom) was standing at the altar and began shouting across the entire church, "Dad, dad, look at Mark. Look at how good he looks!" His father came running up behind us and slowly began to notice Mark's outfit piece by piece, complimenting him without at first realizing it was a tuxedo.

The wedding planners then took over and arranged for Mark to enter and exit the church with his father and to sit in the front with the immediate family.

Upon arrival at the reception there was a sit-down cocktail hour with strolling musicians. Mark is an avid music-lover and plays the keyboard, which he calls a piano. He went directly to the musicians, struck up a conversation and apparently a friendship with the saxophonist. I had my camera with me simply to take photos of Mark. As I was positioning him for a photo, the saxophonist, while still playing, walked across the room to be in the photo with Mark. After the first photo I realized the lighting was incorrect and moved Mark away from the window. The musician followed, while still playing. Mark's excitement could no longer be contained, so he reached over, pulled down the head of the musician and planted a big kiss on his cheek with great joy and demonstrative exuberance.

Mark was then called upon to leave the room and to enter with the wedding party. He did so with the best man, who is also his cousin and with whom he was very comfortable. People, cheered, shouted, applauded, whistled and shouted Mark's name. He was actually doubled over with delight. In fact, he was almost ballistic and this of course caused the guests to further cheer him on. It was such a special moment.

He spent the evening eating, drinking, danc-



Carol Maker and a dashing Mark.

ing and just generally having a wonderful happy time. Those who love him and hold him close to their hearts reveled in his excitement and enjoyment of the event. It was such a great day and a memory that I shall

always treasure in my heart.

*Carol Maker is a recently retired administrative technician in the Student Service Department of the English Montreal School*

## A Lazylegz exclusive: Report from the Paralympic Games

By Luca "Lazylegz" Patuelli

*Editor's note: Born with a disorder that hampers bone and muscle growth below the waist, Luca "Lazylegz" Patuelli expresses himself through break dancing with his crutches. He wrote this exclusive piece for Inspirations about his experience at the Paralympic Games.*

One of my biggest career dreams came to reality on March 12, 2010 in Vancouver, B.C. I had just gotten off stage and it was not until then I realized I had just danced in front of 60,000 people in a gigantic stadium and not just at any event, but the opening ceremonies for the Paralympic Games.

All I can really remember is the stress and nervousness I had before appearing on stage. I was to perform immediately after Team Canada was introduced. My palms were sweaty and I kept on wiping my hands on my pants so my hands wouldn't slip off my

crutches while I was dancing. Then I hear in my in-ear monitor "Stand By Luca." I put myself in position and then I heard "cue music in 5,4,3,2,1 go Luca." This is it... that's what was going through my mind the whole time during the performance. All I could think about was that this was the moment, my moment to really show the world what I have been doing all these years. I was so in my own world during the performance that I could not hear the crowd until I raised my crutch up high at the end of the performance. That's when I told myself that I did it. It was the highlight of my career and I cannot describe my emotions, but the feeling of joy and knowing that one



Luca "Lazylegz" Patuelli is seen here at an appearance in 1996 at the Mackay Centre School.

of my biggest dreams became a reality is incredible. I know I could not have done it without the help of my crew and my family so I thank them and everyone else for all for your support and belief in me.

After the performance I also experienced

another incredible moment. I was invited to participate in the press conference where the other headline performers and invited guests were able to speak about the opening ceremonies. In this press conference I was standing next to Betty and Rolly Fox (the parents of the late Terry Fox), Zach Beaumont (future Paralympian), Martin Deschamps (Montreal rock singer), Chantal Petitclerc (Canadian Paralympian champion), Aimee Mullins (Paralympian athlete and fashion model), Aaron Fotheringham (extreme wheelchair rider), Christian Bailey (extreme wheelchair rider and professional surfer), and Rick Hansen (national hero). They have all made a major impact around the world to promote and advocate for people with disabilities, that it was an absolute honour to be sharing this experience with these amazing people.

The mission and message for the Paralympic opening ceremonies was "One inspires all." I personally believe that we all inspire each other and we need to learn off each other in order to build a positive society. I can tell you that this experience has inspired me and I will continue to do what I love to show the world that anything is possible and there are "No Excuses, No Limits."



## From the Editor

# Special needs is on the agenda

— An inspiring visit to Ottawa

This is the fourth edition of *Inspirations*, a publication I launched with the support of Lew Lewis less than two years ago. Lew is my colleague at the English Montreal School Board. As the director of Student Services he has always devoted a lot of attention to students with special needs. Similarly, as the communications and marketing specialist for the Board I have come across so many stories of individuals who have overcome tremendous obstacles. It is for this reason that Lew and I agreed upon the name *Inspirations*. In each edition we want to profile people who “inspire” us.

*Inspirations* is sponsored by the EMSB, but circulated throughout the Montreal area, Laval and the South Shore. We can now add Ottawa to the equation. Last month I decided to devote a day on Parliament Hill and try to showcase *Inspirations*. One of the individuals I anxiously wanted to meet was Steven Fletcher. He was a young mining engineer in Manitoba in 1996 when an automobile collision with a moose left him a quadriplegic. Despite being paralyzed from the neck down, he returned to university for his MBA and has been elected to Parliament in the last three elections. He is no mere MP, but the minister of democratic reform. When I visited his very busy office, his father David presented me with a copy of the



The Hon. Diane Finley.

book *The Steven Fletcher Story: What Do You Do If You Don't Die?* You can read Stuart Nulman's compelling book review on this powerful publication. Fletcher has such a great disposition. I enjoyed his sense of humour and told him what a role model he is for others.



Mike Cohen meets Steven Fletcher in Ottawa.

Before leaving for Ottawa, I wanted to know if there was a de facto minister for individuals with special needs. This role, in fact, belongs to Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development Diane Finley. The MP for Haldimand-Norfolk in Simcoe, Ontario shared with me her battle with Graves Disease, an autoimmune condition which causes over-activity of the thyroid. For some time she had to wear sunglasses in the House of Commons due to a hypersensitivity to light. “I had five surgeries and I am fortunate that the last one was successful,” said the minister, who is also responsible for the Federal Office for Disability Issues.

Finley told me that when she was in opposition, the headquarters for the Office for Disability Issues was ironically not accessible for the handicapped. “There were actually two offices at the time,” she said. “Now we have one office across the river in Gatineau. Not only is it accessible, it is in fact a showcase for accessibility.”

Minister Finley was particularly proud about the 2010 federal budget and its commitment to help people with disabilities and their families participate fully in Canada's social and economic life.

The actions proposed are:

- a 10-year carry-forward of Canada Disability Savings Grant and Canada Dis-

ability Savings Bond entitlements, because some families may not be able to contribute regularly to their Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP).

- allow a deceased individual's RRSP or Registered Retirement Income Fund proceeds to be transferred, tax-free, to the RDSP of a financially dependent disabled child or grandchild.

- \$45 million over the next three years to extend and expand the Enabling Accessibility Fund, which enhances accessibility for people with disabilities.

- \$5 million a year to the Canadian Paralympic Committee to build on the successes of our Paralympians and continue to encourage people with disabilities to actively participate in sport.

- \$2 million over two years to Special Olympics Canada to help enrich the lives of Canadians with an intellectual disability through sport and competition and prepare them for competition in Special Olympics events.
- a one-year \$30-million increase in funding for Skills Link, a component of the Youth Employment Strategy, which helps youth facing a range of circumstances, including young people with disabilities.

In addition, the second year of Canada's Economic Action will continue other projects announced in the 2009 federal budget that help people with disabilities. For example, providing a one-time federal investment of \$1 billion over two years for renovations and energy retrofits to social housing, including renovations that support people with disabilities. An additional \$75 million was invested over two years in the Affordable Housing Initiative for the construction of new housing units for people with disabilities. Enhanced tax relief provided by the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) by \$580 million includes an increase in the WITB supplement for people eligible for the Disability Tax Credit. The supplement currently provides up to \$462.50 in additional WITB payments. In 2009 the government made available funds to enhance the

accessibility of Crown-owned buildings for people with disabilities. To date, 40 projects have been completed, and over 175 projects worth about \$16 million are currently underway.

Minister Finley also recently announced funding for the Paralympic Torch Relay National Educational Outreach Initiative of the Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability (ALACD). This will provide schools, communities, and young people across Canada with a better understanding of the needs of people with disabilities. The initiative will also promote the benefits of healthy communities, healthy lifestyles, and individual excellence; show support for Canadian Paralympic athletes; and encourage the participation of new athletes in the Paralympic movement.

The Active Living Alliance for Canadians with a Disability is a national not-for-profit organization that is dedicated to the wellness of Canadians with disabilities through healthy active living. The Alliance, which was created in 1989, is a national network of more than 125 organizations dedicated to sport, recreation, and health, and it has a community reach of more than half a million Canadians. It is organized in every province and territory and has a strong outreach in Canadian communities to connect citizens with disabilities to local opportunities.



Steven Fletcher has learned to write using his mouth.

The Government of Canada has provided funding of \$96,000 to the ALACD. This investment will increase awareness of the Paralympic Torch Relay and the Paralympic Games through presentations, demonstrations, celebrations, and knowledge transfer of the abilities of Canadians with a disability and the Paralympic movement in general.

Log on to [http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability\\_issues/disability\\_savings/index.shtml](http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/eng/disability_issues/disability_savings/index.shtml) to read more about the Disability Savings Account. Bravo Steven Fletcher and Diane Finley!

— Mike Cohen



# Inspiring Book Review

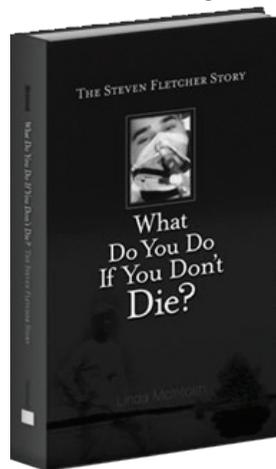
By Stuart Nulman

~~~~~ *The Steven Fletcher Story* by Linda McIntosh (Heartland Associates, Inc., \$29.95)

In January of 1996, Steven Fletcher was a young man with a bright, prospective future ahead of him.

At the time, the 26-year-old native of Winnipeg was an avid outdoorsman, a champion athlete and was working as an engineer for a mining company in the northern Manitoba town of Bissett, located in the heart of the Canadian Shield. With a loving family and girlfriend, Steven was about to carve out a path for his future. He was applying for admission to the Masters of Business Administration (MBA) program at the University of Manitoba, and was about to start a new engineering job with much more responsibilities for a mining company at Kirkland Lake, a town in Northern Ontario.

But early in the morning of January 11, 1996, it all came crashing down to a screeching halt for Steven Fletcher. While driving back to Bissett, Steven swerved his car to avoid hitting a baby moose that was on the highway. He then hit a giant moose, and the impact caused his vehicle to land in a steep highway ditch; the moose landed on the car's roof, which not only caused part of it to shear off, but also caused Steven's neck to snap forward. The effects to Steven from this very serious car accident was devastat-



ing. As a result, he received a C4 level injury and a broken neck, which left him as a quadriplegic, which meant he was paralyzed from the neck down.

Steven spent nearly a year in hospital recovering from the injuries he sustained in the accident; however, what would have followed – which included living in a nursing facility – would have proven demoralizing for Steven, especially because he always enjoyed living an independent way of life. So he pursued the difficult, yet successful, road to independence as a quadriplegic. He got his MBA degree from the University of Manitoba and then pursued a life in politics, first as student union president at the university, then as president of the Manitoba Progressive Conservative Party. During the 2004 federal election, he made history as the first C4 quadriplegic ever to be elected to the House of Commons, as the Member of Parliament for the Winnipeg riding of Charleswood-St. James-Assiniboia.

Steven Fletcher's inspiring, never-say-die story has been told in fascinating detail in Linda McIntosh's biography *What Do You Do If You Don't Die?*

A former Manitoba politician, and close friend and mentor to Fletcher, McIntosh has told Fletcher's story with a great deal of objectivity and realism. Although what Fletch-

er has achieved in the face of adversity has been, to say the least, remarkable, the book outlines the difficulties, frustrations and prejudices that disabled people like Fletcher go through in everyday life.

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## What Do You Do If You Don't Die?

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First of all, there is the constant physical and medical care that Fletcher has to get virtually around the clock (including being turned around in bed and having his bodily functions manually taken care of), which would not have been possible without his dedicated team of office staff and medical aides who are constantly at his side. Then there was the prejudice he faced from the administrators from the University of Manitoba and members of the Manitoba political scene, who believed that his disability would pose a major hinderance and inconvenience towards achieving his goals. And most frustrating of all, was the uphill battle that Fletcher faced against the Manitoba Public Insurance Corporation (MPI), which constantly refused his claims for funding to help pay for the extra care he gets from his rotating team of aides (which began in

earnest at the time when Fletcher was Manitoba Tory President, and the MPI was being run by the province's NDP government); it's a battle that Fletcher is still fighting to this day.

Everything aside, this has not prevented Fletcher from being the best MP he could be for his constituents. He holds regular "Fletcher Forums" to inform his constituents on the issues of the day; he has served the Harper government valiantly in the field of health care, and has successfully introduced national strategies when it comes to heart disease, mental health, mental illness and cancer control; and thanks to his efforts on Parliament Hill, has gained the respect and admiration across Canada and around the world to show that having a disability doesn't mean that one cannot contribute to society as a whole.

Steven Fletcher defines what a true role model should be like, and *What Do You Do If You Don't Die?* really brings out this definition. His grit, determination and penchant for serving the common good makes Steven Fletcher Canada's "Happy Warrior" and a tireless advocate for those who have to face the worst adversities a person can have thrust upon him quite unexpectedly. This book will not only leave you informed, it will leave you truly inspired.

And Steven Fletcher's philosophy of how he conducts his life since the dreadful accident on January 11, 1996 that forever changed his life, was best summed up during a statement he released on the 11th anniversary of the accident in 2007, in which he quoted the following passage from Kahlil Gibra: "I would that my life be a tear and a smile ... A tear to unite me with those of a broken heart; a smile to be a sign of joy in my existence."

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## Visually impaired entrepreneur launches business

By Stuart Nulman

David Melanson always felt that there was a growing need for visually impaired students to get themselves mainstreamed into a normal classroom setting. Born two months premature, which left him with total blindness in his right eye and only 10 percent vision in his left eye, Melanson was himself successfully mainstreamed during the 1970s.

After obtaining degrees in English and Sociology, he became a consultant in 1997 to many of the major school boards across Montreal, including the English Montreal School Board (EMSB) and the Lester B. Pearson School Board (LPBSB). He regu-

larly runs workshops and question and answer sessions at many schools (usually on Pedagogical Days) on how to mainstream a visually impaired child into a regular classroom setting.

"I introduce to teachers certain adaptive equipment, which helps students with different ways of seeing and reading the blackboard," says Melancon. "I even wrote a resource manual on mainstreaming. There is a need for this type of service, because mainstreaming of visually impaired students is happening more often, and teachers have to know how to meet the needs of these children in the classroom."

Besides his educational consulting work, Melanson is also branching out in a new business that would fulfill another type of need, only this time it would benefit those who need to give a special gift for a special occasion.

With his Verdun home as its base, Melanson will be using Internet technology to conduct his new venture, which is customized gift baskets. Potential customers would check out what's available on his business website (which is currently under construction), and then would e-mail Melanson with their requested type of gift basket (filled with dif-

ferent assortments of coffee, chocolate or soap) and choose one of the three size gift baskets available (small for \$30, medium for \$50 and large for \$70). Payment would be done through the PayPal service and each customized gift basket will be shipped to the customer by FedEx.

*For more information about "Dave's Gifts," you can e-mail him at [davem@mailcall.ca](mailto:davem@mailcall.ca).*



## Adapted Travel by Mike Cohen

### North Miami Beach's Inspiring Mayor

Located midway between Miami and Ft. Lauderdale and adjacent to the Golden Glades Interchange, where I-95, Florida's Turnpike, and the Palmetto Expressway meet, North Miami Beach is truly at the "Crossroads of South Florida." The central location and easy access has made this one of South Florida's best known regional shopping areas and one of its most popular sites for office users.

North Miami Beach also happens to have a former Montrealer as mayor. Myron Rosner was elected to the top job last year. Rosner, 49, says the seeds for his move here were planted 19 years ago when he came to visit his mother here in the winter.



Myron Rosner with his children at Disney's Animal Kingdom in Florida.

Gerda Rosner is a well known travel guru and spa operator who at the age of 87 is still going strong with an operation at the Imperial Club in Aventura. On this day she asked a colleague to play matchmaker, asking if she had "a nice Jewish girl" to fix her son up with. It turned out she did. Sarah Zabel, now a Miami Dade County Circuit Judge, turned out to be the girl of Myron's dreams and within two years they were husband and wife. They have four children

As far as careers go, Rosner had worked as a property developer and project manager in Montreal. It did not take him long to find work in that field here, ironically for a business owned by two Montrealers. Within two years Rosner had obtained a license as a general contractor and established his own company.

In 2001 Rosner's life took an awful turn when a construction site accident put him in a wheelchair for life. "My life and that of my family was completely altered in a matter of seconds," he says. "As a builder I was already aware of the requirements for Americans with Disabilities Act compliance, but never realized until I was in a chair myself how people really don't get it. What appears on paper may look practical but in practicality does not actually work."

Through this unfortunate experience, Rosner found a need and has acquired the knowledge necessary to successfully perform accessibility improvements and barrier removal. He has not let his injury stop him and he has listened to his wife and kids to "never give up." Through his family's support he has become involved in many personal hobbies, such as, building an accessible boat with a lift, waterskiing, modifying a Boss Hoss motorcycle trike, playing wheelchair tennis, swimming, and riding his three wheeled bicycle. In 2003 he was elected to North Miami Beach city council. He decided to run for mayor last spring because he was not happy with how the leadership was performing. Rosner has a two-year term and puts in long hours at city hall and his construction company, never looking for sympathy. "Usually, when someone is with me for a few minutes, they see beyond the chair," he says.

Naturally, making North Miami Beach accessible to the handicapped remains a priority for Rosner. He does concede that the city was already among the most progressive in the United States in terms of disability programs for adults when he was elected. "All of the money we collect from those who break the law and park in handicapped spots goes to pay for these programs," he says. "All of our public facilities are accessible. I must say that anything I have asked our staff to fix they have done so."

#### South Beach: The China Grill Experience

South Beach is the section of Miami that encompasses the southernmost 23 blocks of an island separating the Atlantic Ocean and Biscayne Bay. In both daytime and at nightfall, South Beach is a major entertainment destination with hundreds of nightclubs, restaurants, boutiques and hotels.

The spectacular China Grill Restaurant ([www.chinagrillmgt.com](http://www.chinagrillmgt.com)) at 404 Washington Avenue comes highly recommended. First off, the establishment offers valet parking, and it is handicapped accessible. If any member of your party is in a wheelchair, ask to be seated at the main level. There are special handicapped accessible washrooms for males and females. For those with vision problems, keep in mind

that the restaurant is very dark, with candles at each table. The servers will be happy to provide you with a small flashlight to help you better navigate the menu.



The China Grill South Beach.

Virtually every dish at China Grill is prepared on the grill or in a wok, using sauces strictly for flavor. Portions are generous, and artfully presented on bold, oversized plates, and above all, meant for sharing. We started off with some fabulous crab cake, some salads (crackling calamari and confucius chicken) lamb spareribs and regular calamari) and perhaps the best sushi rolls I have tasted in a long time – the kaleidoscope (salmon, tuna, cream cheese and spicy mango) and crunchy tuna.

Spectacular entrees, large enough for two to three people, include Shanghai lobster with ginger, curry and crispy spinach, Korean kalbi rib eye with truffled artichoke-potato hash, wild mushroom profusion pasta with sake Madeira cream sauce, duck two ways, sweet soy marinated skirt steak, tempura sashimi with hot mustard-champagne sauce, lobster pancakes with wild mushrooms and red chili and coconut milk. A selection of nine popular side dishes include wasabi mashed potatoes, crispy spinach, and five vegetable fried rice among others. Do not worry about over ordering. The staff will package any of the leftovers up so you can continue to enjoy the China Grill experience. Save some room for dessert. We recommend the cheesecake pot stickers (with the five spice chocolate raspberry, mango and ping sauce), the Great Wall (vanilla, chocolate and caramel ice cream, toasted meringue, fresh berry and whipped cream) and the hazel nut chocolate torte (blackberry and orange cream and anglaise sauce). For reservations, call (305) 534-2211.

#### Sunny Isles Beach

The beautiful community of Sunny Isles Beach, known as Florida's Riviera, is located on a barrier island in the northeast corner

of Miami-Dade County, bounded by the Atlantic Ocean on the east and the Intracoastal Waterway on the west. Located midway between downtown Miami and Fort Lauderdale, with easy access to business centers, Sunny Isles also includes entertainment, sports and recreational facilities, and tourist attractions.

#### The Acqualina

With panoramic vistas of the sea and Miami's glittering skyline, the Acqualina Resort & Spa on the Beach ([www.acqualina.com](http://www.acqualina.com)) is indeed an ultra-luxury destination. Most recently it earned the prestigious AAA Five Diamond Award for 2010. Acqualina boasts 4.5 beachfront acres with 400 feet of stunning Atlantic coastline, 188 residences, 97 impeccable guestrooms and suites, a 20,000 square-foot ESPA award-winning oceanfront spa, two oceanfront restaurants, four swimming pools and an innovative marine biology-based children's AcquaMarine program. My family and I have been fortunate to spend some time here each time we are in the Sunny Isles area.

As reported on [thewheelchairsite.com](http://thewheelchairsite.com), swimming is an activity with many benefits. It can be physically and mentally therapeutic and should be an activity that's accessible for everyone. The cooling, buoyant feature of water allows wheelchair bound individuals the ability to move in ways that would be impossible on the ground. Many public pools have made it a priority to install pool ramps. The people behind the large Walt Disney water parks around the world, for example, have designed several pools with zero-entry pool ramps in the past few years. These descend into the water like a shore would to the sea,



Acqualina Beach Club Pool

and then deepen gradually to a standard depth. Everyone deserves the right to enjoy a pool on a hot summer day. Thanks to zero-entry pool ramps, almost everyone can. The Acqualina's zero-depth entry makes it simple for someone in a wheelchair to enjoy the experience of this warm and comfortable pool.

The Acqualina has a breathtaking poolside, with wonderful drinks, snacks and lunch service via the Costa Grill. Whether it is smoothies, a turkey club wrap, a chicken sandwich or something from the children's menu, service



is quick and the food tastes great.

### *Il Mulino New York*

The Aqualina is also home to one of the best restaurants in all of South Florida: Il Mulino New York ([www.ilmulino.com](http://www.ilmulino.com)). Renowned for its bustling and energetic atmosphere, market fresh daily specials, extensive selection of fine Italian wines and an impeccably polished wait staff, this is one of more than a dozen (and counting) Il Mulino locations. It has already become a much sought-after establishment, frequented by both locals and visitors in the know.

The 110-seat indoor restaurant spreads onto a 24-seat veranda overlooking the ocean. Service here is absolutely spectacular. Experienced Maitre 'D Tino Ponti Corvo is there to greet you while regional director of operations



*The beautiful poolside of the Aqualina.*

Susan Buckley is often on site and your contact to book private functions.

The menu draws upon the rustic and hearty Abruzzi region in Italy with complimentary antipasto tastings of soppressata, bruschetta, reggiano parmesan, fried zucchini and garlic/cheese bread sticks, and dishes like spaghetti bolognese, rack of lamb (a half rack will probably be sufficient), scampi oregana, veal piccata and langoustines, with old-world service and tableside cooking provided by the staff. Ask for the fish specials, such as dover sole. Delicious sides include rosemary potatoes and risotto. The tortellini soup is simply the best of its kind I have ever tasted, while the Caesar salad gets high marks as well.

The wine list includes over 200 selections of Italian varieties and guests are offered a complimentary glass of signature house Grappa prepared by Tino himself. Also on the dessert menu, the flourless chocolate cake, the cheese-cake and the tiramisu are to die for. Ask for the sampler, which includes a tasting of all of their desserts on one tray. If there are kids in your party make a request for waiter Jose and section captain Gustava. When the child in our party asked for langoustines (prawns), Jose returned to the table with a sampling of what to choose. "This one's name is Sophia and the other is Mario," he joked. "Which one do you want?"

Tino, by the way, is particularly proud of his homemade grappa. He wheeled the grappa over to our table and insisted we try some. Tino even had some "imitation" grappa for the

kids.

Il Mulino New York is handicapped accessible. There is a valet parking at the main entrance of the hotel, which leads directly to the restaurant. Everything is at the same level. Ask for a table on the main level of the restaurant or the terrace. Neither involves any stairs. Washrooms are also handicapped accessible. You can view the menu on their website.

### *The Trump International*

Just a few doors down you will find the spectacular Trump International Beach Resort ([www.trumpmiami.com](http://www.trumpmiami.com)). This is a lavish oceanfront oasis, complete with its own private and pristine beach and delightful grotto-style pool complex. This facility offers 390 oversized guest rooms and suites, each with a private balcony and spectacular views of the Atlantic Ocean or Intracoastal Waterway. For the true experience of luxury, try to reserve the pool and beach cabana food and beverage experience. I cannot understate how strongly I recommend it. We have been fortunate to experience this on more than one occasion.

The oversized air conditioned cabanas redefine the hotel experience and include a refrigerator stocked with soft drinks and water, a television, wet bar area and microwave, a table and chairs, couch and chaise lounges.

Beach cabanas are equipped with private bathrooms and showers. Overlooking either the pool or beach, your cabana attendant will serve you three separate culinary offerings throughout the day, based on two adults. Additional items may be ordered and charged to the guest room directly. Start off with the Rise & Shine experience at 10 a.m. with some



*An aerial view of The Trump International*

smoothies, fresh fruit and berry blend accented with Brazilian acai berry, French press coffee, citrus scented tea scones with agave honey, Vermont butter and sour cream pound cake with yogurt topping. The Siesta at 2 p.m. features a choice of fresh muddled Mexican margaritas or Miami mojitos, beef empanadas, cilantro chili salsa and mini Cuban sandwiches. In between, if you have room in the tummy, you can sample some dessert. The club sandwiches are extraordinary. At 4 p.m., our server stopped by the cabana with the Sunset snack: Floridian mango champagne cocktail, bitter-sweet chocolate dipped fruits and champagne biscuits. All cabanas can be rented on a daily or half day basis – they are simply the ideal place to conduct business, plan a family outing or simply unwind.

The Trump International Beach Resort is handicapped accessible. There is valet park-

ing for guests and visitors, with the front door leading to the lobby and elevators to the beach and the main pool area. The latter is easy to navigate in a wheelchair. Last year the Trump launched its new community outreach program, Make a Difference. An extension of the Trump International Beach Resort's mission to create a "World of Difference" in the service provided to their guests and staff, the Make a Difference program takes the concept one step further, outside of the hotel doors and into the community.

While the first initiative was eco-education in schools, Make a Difference will additionally extend a helping hand to nonprofit organizations, hospitals, children's camps, and homeless shelters as well as many other venues.

### *Chicago: one of America's most disability-friendly cities*

CHICAGO- The city of Chicago ([www.choosechicago.com](http://www.choosechicago.com)) is a bustling, energetic place that never stops no matter the season. It's a destination with world-class cultural attractions, diverse neighborhoods and architectural wonders. Chicago is known for critically acclaimed restaurants, world-famous museums, first-class shopping, adventurous nightlife, action-packed sporting events and a thriving theater scene.

I have been to the Windy City a couple of times now. My most recent visit was in April. Recently selected as one of America's most disability-friendly cities by the National Organization on Disability, Chicago is accessible for visitors with special needs.

Easy Access Chicago (773.388.8839) offers comprehensive accessibility information about more than 100 top attractions, transportation, O'Hare / Midway airports, hotel, restaurants, and more. You'll also find listings of accessible tours and key disability services. Scootaround Wheelchair & Scooter Rentals (888.441.7575) provides a wide range of mobility solutions including renting mobility scooters, wheelchairs, and powerchairs. The Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities provides information on accessibility at the city's many lakefront festivals, wheelchair accessible taxicabs, renting hand cycles, and much more. Deaf Communication by Innovation provides qualified sign language interpreters / translators for travelers. The Taxi Access Program (800-281-4466) is the dispatch service for more than 20 taxicab companies which operate wheelchair accessible minivans equipped with ramps, wheelchair securements, and shoulder seat belts. Download the Easy Access guide from [choosechicago.com/travelresources/services](http://choosechicago.com/travelresources/services). It is most comprehensive.

For both of my visits I chose the, affordable and conveniently located, Homewood Suites ([www.homewoodsuiteschicago.com](http://www.homewoodsuiteschicago.com)), located right in the heart of downtown at 40 East Grand Avenue. Guests of this Homewood Suites hotel can overlook Chicago's well known architecture while enjoying the daily

complimentary Suite Start hot breakfast or the Welcome Home reception featuring a complimentary light meal and beverages Monday through Thursday evenings. The breakfast is really something special. What is most appreciated by guests is the fact the hotel encourages you to take food back to your room by providing styrofoam containers.

The spacious two room suites are designed with comfortable accommodations for both business and leisure travelers staying for a few days or weeks. Guests are well taken care of with the fully equipped kitchens complete with refrigerators, microwave ovens, stove top burners and cooking utensils. A dishwasher is also provided; however, the Suite-keepers insist on doing the dishes. A large Jewel and Osco grocery store is a mere block and a half away, making it easy to stock the fridge regularly. All guest rooms come with high-speed Internet access and a two-line phone with voicemail. Guests can pamper themselves in the indoor pool, located in the 19th floor with panoramic views of the beautiful Windy City or workout in the cardiovascular fitness center.

The hotel has been fully certified by the American Disabilities Association (ADA) in terms of the size of the rooms and general accessibility. Twelve rooms are specifically designed for exceptional guests, featuring wider doors, and larger bathrooms. Everything in the rooms has been brought down in height to accommodate the wheelchair bound client. There are also special smoke and fire alarms for the hearing impaired. The hotel recently installed roll in showers to three of the 12 rooms. Because this is an extended stay hotel, the Homewood Suites is used by the Rehabilitation Institute of Chicago and the University of Chicago for the families of patients, whereby special room rates are applied.

Chicago's theatre industry pushes the envelope with cutting-edge performances in historic and state-of-the-art stages. They are all handicapped accessible, as are the city's many museums. Be sure to check out the John G. Shedd Aquarium ([www.sheddaquarium.org](http://www.sheddaquarium.org)). Wheelchairs are available for checkout on a first-come, first-served basis with appropriate identification and a credit card. With a minimum of two weeks notice, the aquarium will try to arrange for a sign language interpreter.

"Chicago serves as a model for its successful design of programs, services and facilities that are fully accessible to persons with disabilities," Mayor Richard M. Daley says proudly. "With 100 percent of our buses accessible and over 60 taxis that can accommodate wheelchairs, visitors and residents can easily get to their choice of hundreds of accessible venues and events."

Mike Cohen's email address is [mcohen@emsb.qc.ca](mailto:mcohen@emsb.qc.ca). Follow his travel adventures at [www.sandboxworld.com/travel](http://www.sandboxworld.com/travel).

## Call for nominations: Teacher of Inspiration



If there is a special teacher you would like to nominate, send your submission to [inspirations@emsb.qc.ca](mailto:inspirations@emsb.qc.ca). Include the name of the teacher, the school and school affiliation (school board, private school, CEGEP or university) and a four paragraph description of why he or she is deserving of this distinction. The recipient will be recognized at a public school board council meeting and presented with a special gift from the Rosemount Technology Centre. [www.rosemount-technology.qc.ca](http://www.rosemount-technology.qc.ca)

Inspirations is pleased to introduce two special recognition awards: the Teacher of Inspiration and the Caregiver of Inspiration. We are presently seeking nominations for The Teacher of Inspiration. The recipient will be announced in the fall edition of Inspirations, at which time we will then accept candidates for The Caregiver of Inspiration.



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