



Between Friends

 Perspectives...

EXTEND-A-FAMILY

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BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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Co-Chair: Sue Petko

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Director: Anne Bloom

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Director: Chris LeClair

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Christy Barber

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Mirjana Prikril

Sam Rocchese

Liz Short

Happy New Year

In an attempt to brighten the spirit during the cold winter months, Extend-A-Family is pleased to once again host a Winter Celebration of Friendship. Please join us at Earl Bales Community Centre, on Sunday February 15th for an afternoon of fun, food and friendship.

Christy Barber, Co-ordinator of The Safe & Secure Futures Project has planned a presentation on Monday February 23rd. The evening will focus on Estate planning considerations. Please look for details on page 3 of the newsletter.

As we remain committed to supporting children and youth who have a disability to participate fully in the community, we will once again be applying to HRDC for funding to hire summer students. Families will be contacted in early February to determine how Extend-A-Family can best support opportunities for inclusion. We will be focusing on providing support for children to attend integrated community recreation programs as well as supporting teens to participate in planned community activities.

Wishing all our friends a Healthy & Happy New Year.

∞ Anne Marie Cole, Executive Director, Extend-A-Family ∞

Board of Director's Report

As co-chairperson of your Extend-A-Family Board I would like to welcome back board members Michelle Schmidt, Bill Mosher, Bob Glass and Anne Bloom. At the same time I would like to welcome Rajeev Agarwal and Christine LeClair to the Board of Extend-A-Family. Chris is a parent of a child with a disability. Rajeev comes to us as an interested and supportive community member who is looking forward to serving on our board.

The board has met twice since our very successful Annual General Meeting and social in June. We always welcome interested prospective board members to write us a letter introducing themselves and suggesting the areas of interest where they would like to participate on the board. We then invite them to attend some board meetings and see if they would be interested in becoming a member. We are especially seeking parents to come onto the board. At monthly meetings Anne Marie Cole, our Executive Director brings the board up to date on the activities, concerns, finances and any news as it relates to the operation of Extend-A-Family. On a personal note as a board member I am always proud of the direction of our organization and the support that our dedicated staff provides numerous families across Toronto.

∞ Sue Petko, Co-Chair, Board of Directors, Extend-A-Family ∞



Extend-a-Family Welcomes Our Two New Board Members

Rajeev Agarwal

Rajeev Agarwal has agreed to join us as a Treasurer of our Board of Directors. He is a CGA, CPA (US) and a CISA & works for a software company (Changepoint Corporation) in Richmond Hill. He has a wonderful wife Deepti and two lovely daughters Ashima and Nitika aged 9 & 7 respectively. He loves gardening, camping and traveling. Rajeev likes the mission and vision of Extend-A-Family.

Chris LeClair

Being a single a mom is never easy. Being a single mom of a child with special needs is certainly a challenge. Chris is looking forward to serving on the Board of Extend-A-Family as she feels it will provide a unique opportunity to help her son as well as other individuals with special needs.

Winter Gathering

Come join us for our Annual Winter Gathering!

Live Band / Outdoor Activities / Crafts

Pizza & Drinks Provided - Feel free to bring dessert

Location: Earl Bales Park (Bathurst & Sheppard)

Date / Time: February 15, 2004 / 2:00 - 4:30

RSVP to Cate Houghton at 416.484.1317 by February 6, 2004

Budding Webmaster

12-year-old Michael Dzura is no stranger to technology. He is an expert on adaptive devices and a very talented webmaster in the making. As well as being self-taught to a large extent, he has enjoyed formal training like that which he received at the University of Toronto Summer Computer Program this past summer. One of the most rewarding technological experiences for Michael has been consulting with Microsoft Corporation on the evaluation of one of their website projects through his capacity as Ambassador for Ability On-line.

Michael is interested in opportunities to further his experience through helping others. He would like to either teach others the basics of web design and programming or collaborate on projects with groups. If you are interested or know of a need, contact him at powerkid117@yahoo.ca

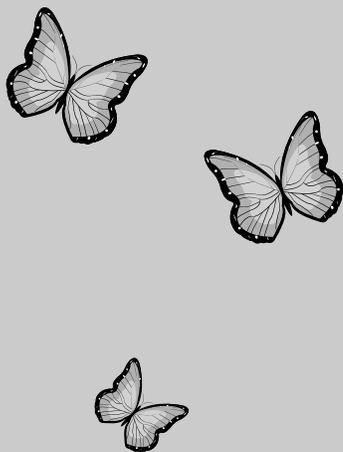
You can also view Michael's own website called, "The Wheelchair World", designed to inform people who use wheelchairs about their choices and about various vendors. Follow the link below to explore!

www.utoronto.ca/atrc/education/workshops/summercamp2003/campers/mdzura/Michael/THEWHEELCHAIR WORLDblue.htm

∞ Kathie Brooks, Coordinator, Extend-A-Family ∞

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Safe and Secure Futures

The Safe and Secure Futures Networks provide opportunities for focused discussion concerning future planning issues affecting our loved ones who have a disability. Topics include relationship building; developing a vision for a good life; discovering ways to contribute- creating valued roles; ensuring financial security; and planning for a home on their own, with quality support. While we emphasize mutual support and information sharing, community partners are invited to present on occasion. In December, representatives of The Ontario Federation for Cerebral Palsy, Long Term Planning and Support Program presented at the West Network meeting.

On February 23rd, we have invited lawyer Arthur Fish to clarify will preparations, and details of recommended trusts.

This is an invitation to family members who are interested in learning strategies for developing individual support networks, sharing both progress and challenges. We want to build hope for a positive future which encompasses the principles of self-determination: freedom; authority; support and responsibility.

East Network - 1st Monday of the month

Bloorview Site of Bloorview Macmillan Children's Centre, 25 Buchan Court (Leslie/Sheppard)

Central Network - last Monday of the month

CL Toronto's Foster Clubhouse, 40 Birch Avenue (Summerhill/Yonge)

West Network - 3rd Monday of the month - except January 12th and June 14th

851 Royal York Rd., United Church - 2 blocks south of Bloor

Hospitality at 7 p.m. Meetings begin at 7:15 p.m.

For more information, please contact Christy Barber, Coordinator, Safe and Secure Futures Project. 416 487-4564



SAFE AND SECURE FUTURES PROJECT

invites you for an evening of

Pizza, Planning, and Partners
Estate planning considerations to protect our family members who have a disability.

Monday February 23rd, 6:30-9 p.m.

Light supper at 6:30pm

Meeting to start at 7:00pm

North York Civic Centre, Committee Room 3
5100 Yonge Street, North York Centre Station
Parking on Beecroft Ave., 1 block west of Yonge

Featured Speaker

Arthur Fish

Lawyer with Borden Ladner Gervais LLP.

Arthur specializes in wills and trusts, and is pleased to offer his expertise in planning with families that need to consider the future of an individual who has a disability. A question and answer period will be a part of the evening.

Registration

Please register by February 20th
with Christy Barber 416 487- 4564

*The project is sponsored by Extend-A-Family,
through a grant from the City of Toronto.*



Proud to be a Sibling...

My name is Kyle Knoepfle son of Irene Knoepfle and brother to the beautiful, but sometimes evil, Amy Knoepfle. Amy is a 5'3" 190 pound ball of love, affection and mischief. For all it's worth to whoever reads this I love that big girl that is "my Amy". I remember Amy stabbing a pencil into my foot when we were both young and ripping the head off my favorite cockatiel in the 8th grade, and lately I can't keep her from calling my cell phone in college. She usually leaves a 3 minute voicemail telling me how much she loves me, and how I need to come home and play "Sorry" with her and she's always sure to leave the house number and the mobile number. (as if I would have forgotten them!) Amy, though stressful on our family, especially the relationship between my parents and I, has given me strengths in life I could not get anywhere else.

I'm a Musical Theater major (and considering Music Therapy for individuals with a disability) and a big part of us getting up and performing on stage is understanding who we are so we know where we can go. Amy has helped me to do this in so many ways, I'll never be able to list them all in this letter. Amy above all has given me an understanding of all people, especially those with disabilities. She has also taught me mountains of patience. I can work with "normal" people on a laid back level and not get excited very easily. Amy has had the ability to teach me to just be myself because that is the only way she can be, she knows nothing else. The "little" problems in life don't seem so bad. I joke around with my friends and say "well at least Amy put a small hole in the wall and not a big one." Friends come to me and talk about their problems because I can give them positive insight as I've seen how things can be, and I try to make them understand that what they're dealing with isn't so bad. Loving unconditionally is also something I have learned from Amy. Through all the faults and misgivings of people, she still loves them just as much. If they hated her she could still love them; that's what God wants isn't it? Though it may be unfair, the girlfriends

I've had always have to be good with Amy. I look at their initial reaction and how they deal with her. One of the biggest kicks was going out with a girl for a month, not mentioning anything about Amy and then seeing how she acted when we walked in the door and were immediately swarmed by a 190 pound girl who wanted a hug. Might be a little scary the first time; it takes a calm person to handle it! I was never embarrassed to bring a friend over to the house because if they weren't cool with Amy, I wasn't okay with them. I wasn't even embarrassed when my ex-girlfriend's mother brought up the idea of me somehow passing on Smith-Magenna Syndrome (SMS) to my children. I didn't know what to say except that it was very unlikely. But later I thought about it and if I had a child with SMS, I probably would have to be a stay home dad to give the care to him/her that they would deserve. And I am okay with that.



I don't normally read the SMS e-mails but my mother directed my attention to the recent e-mails on sending the child with SMS away for the benefit of the siblings. Though I sometimes wonder what that kind of life would have been like, I ask myself what life is really about. Is it about personal satisfaction or is it fulfilling your life, taking everything in from all sides and trying to understand and deal with everything? I'd choose to take it all in again. But everybody has to do what's best for them. I just thought I'd write a memo on my 3 days off from College to say how much I care about "my Amy" and that I wouldn't trade her for the world. Even though I'm going to have

a talk with her about the delete key missing on her computer. You can imagine how annoying it was to type this entire letter without a backspace! It's all in a SMS sibling's workday. Oh and another thing, I came back from college and now all our phones are locked and I can't figure out how to call people from the house. Mom just told me that only 911 and our grandmother's number still work. Hopefully Amy doesn't figure that out. Oh well, just one of those "small things."

∞ Kyle Knoepfle ∞
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The Best Part of My Day

I am in my last semester of high school at Monarch Park Collegiate Institute. Through the school, I am involved in a co-op placement at Muscular Dystrophy Canada - October to January, from 1p.m. - 4 p.m. every day. I am required by the school to keep a daily journal and at the end of the placement, create a poster and do a presentation.

I work with the Ontario / Nunavut team which is comprised of five people. Some of my work involves the client services database. I also work with the peer support program which is telephone based - making phone calls and going through training binders. Although not required, I have been researching muscular dystrophy since I don't know much about this disability. I ask a lot of questions and the staff here are great teachers. I am learning so much! It is a wonderful environment - not stressful, not a "pressure cooker". The time lines are flexible. There are a number of volunteers with disabilities at the office, and we all support each other.

The absolutely best part of this co-op placement is the people. My very first day I was greeted by big smiles all around --- " Glad to have you on the team. Join us for lunch - you are part of the team now." - A warm welcome, indeed! I call my supervisor, Margaret Otter, " my guardian angel ". It really is - the best part of my day!

∞ Catherine Girard ∞



Catherine

Catherine is the most mature and independent co-op student we have ever had . She follows instructions well, asks questions when necessary, but is self-directed as well . She does not pester staff with endless questions, but goes about her work with quiet confidence. Catherine has been given significant tasks to do involving "tidying up" our database. Her computer skills are great, as are her telephone skills; she is polite and assertive, but never aggressive.

One day I saw Catherine waiting patiently for Wheel Trans to take her home. I commented that her 'ride' was late. Co-op students I have had in the past would have been in a panic; not so, Catherine. With a smile, she calmly replied: " It happens all the time." Catherine is going to go places. She looks so nice, and is always pleasant and cooperative. It's a pleasure to have her. We have a lot of fun in our office, and Catherine gets right into it. She is a jewel!

∞ Margaret Otter ∞



Circle of friends, a Principal's Perspective...

During the 2002-2003 school year, staff at Waterfront School had the privilege of working with staff from circle of friends to provide support to several students with special needs. These students were fully included in regular classroom programs. Circle of friends was effective in teaching students about how we are all different but that we share many things in common with one another. The noon hour circle of friends was instrumental in building understanding and establishing friendships between students in the school.

As principal, I was able to advocate for circle of friends with colleagues in other schools so that other schools would benefit as well. We continue to be in touch with staff who facilitated the lunchtime circles and appreciate all of their efforts to assist in building inclusive communities.

∞ David Hill, (Principal) Waterfront School ∞

Andrew and Danny

My name is Andrew Gris. This past summer I was part of the Extend-A-Family team, supporting six different young boys at summer day camps and in the community around their homes. This was my first experience as a summer student with Extend-A-Family, and although I had worked with some individuals with disabilities before, this was my first full integration experience. Three of the boys I supported had placements at special integrated day camps, and the other three I worked with in their communities (doing all sorts of exciting things that we chose together – with some advice from parents of course!)

Although my placements were all very different and unique, one thing stayed the same: the amazing individuals I was matched with were tons of fun to be around. I got a chance to do all sorts of incredible stuff, and experience a variety of different personalities and abilities. Each young boy I supported had such a unique, amazing, surprising, intricate personality; traits and abilities

I never would have imagined – something that was all their own. I felt connected to each of these individuals in a very special and different way, regardless of whether I could communicate fully with them or not.

Spending time with so many individuals was somewhat disappointing, in the sense that I was only able to spend a week (or two weeks, at most) with each incredible individual. Although I've made connections with them, and will never forget each of them, it's difficult because I can't be with them or see them on a regular basis. I'm attending university out of town, which makes things even more difficult. In that way, my experience wasn't really long enough.

Some of my fondest memories are: going with Danny to the Hockey Hall of Fame and Center Island; taking Dominic to the bakery to buy cookies; playing on the swings with Dustin at High Park; shooting

hoops and playing computer games with Matthew; looking for bugs with Anthony; and playing ball hockey with Mark at camp.

I also got the chance to meet some really amazing, wonderful, committed parents. This is one thing I'll never forget; parents with such an involved interest, an unwavering understanding, and such an unforgettable unconditional love. To know that they do everyday, what I did for only two months...is an amazing thought. I hope the parents of these children (and all the other parents of children with disabilities, who I didn't have the pleasure to meet), are proud of the effort and love they provide for their child everyday. That is as inspiring and memorable as the experiences I had with each of the individuals themselves.

As well, I'd like to thank Mirjana, Marijan, Christy, and the other Extend-A-Family coordinators who I got a chance to meet this summer. Everyone at Extend-A-Family, and all the others I met by association, had such a positive impact on me. Thank you for a unique, unforgettable summer experience.

∞ Andrew Gris, Summer Student ∞

This summer our son Danny had the good fortune of meeting Andrew, a university student hired by Mirjana. Late in June, Mirjana brought Andrew over so we could all meet. Danny was a little reluctant to come out and meet with him but Andrew quickly put Dan at ease offering to play some road hockey with him. This was a great introduction for them both.

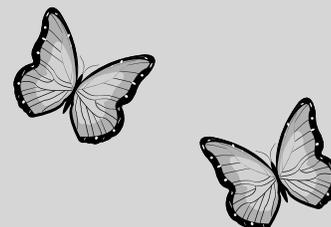
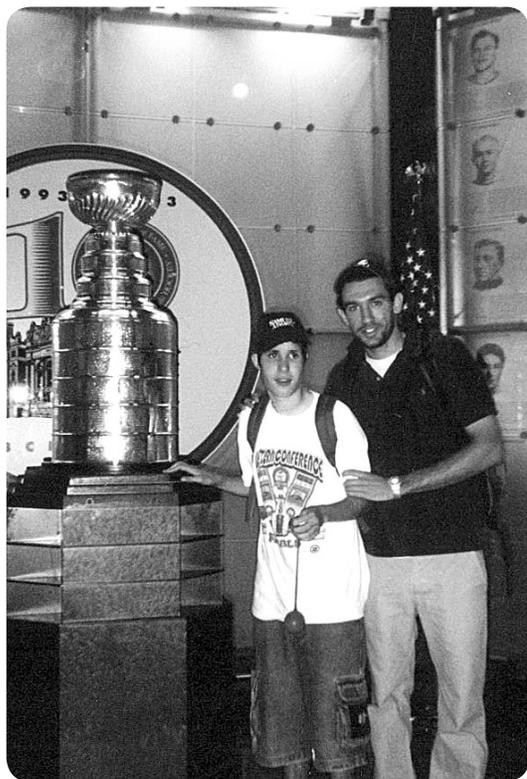
During the days, they spent together, Dan and Andrew went to Center Island, the Hockey Hall of Fame and played many, many rounds of mini-golf and bowling. Andrew said Dan was training to become a golf and bowling pro!

It was a real treat having Andrew support Dan this summer. Not only did Dan benefit from his friendship but my husband and I benefited from the respite he provided knowing our son was in good hands. Dan was kept active and happy as Andrew had lots of energy for play.

Andrew said he will try to telephone Dan when he's back in the city visiting with his family. Hearing that made us feel great! We hope to hear from him sometime. Dan says he missed him already!

Thank you Mirjana and Extend-A-Family for making our summer so enjoyable!

∞ Laura, Gerry and Danny ∞



A Summer to Remember...

I wanted to thank you for being great supervisors/coordinators this past summer. Having you guide me through the process of working with various children with special needs and disabilities has been very helpful and inspirational. The patience and the compassion that I gained over the summer have been so beneficial in all aspects of my life. I just wanted to let you know that my summer experience with Extend-A-Family has helped me in choosing a career path and has also helped me in understanding the content of the courses that I am currently taking. Thank you so much for everything and maybe, I'll get to work with you again sometime in the future.

∞ Kristen Palomera, Summer Student ∞

Perspective of a Summer Student

My opportunities while working for Extend-A-Family made this summer one of the best experiences of my life. I watched as the individuals I worked with were accepted and encouraged by the children around them. The times that I felt most satisfied with my job were the times when I felt that I was not needed at all, when a child's peer reached out and gave the support and affection needed as a friend. For much of the summer I was in a camp setting, allowing me to have as much fun as the camper I went with! Having the opportunity to join in the activities with Joey, Kerr, Sarin and Mardig made me feel at times like I was a camper again. With the swimming and the sports, and the other campers who were always there to lend their support, I felt that I was watching and participating in the creation of some awesome summer memories. I also learned a lot through my experiences over the summer. Sarah taught me how to get around her part of the city and introduced me to Riverdale Farm, an old favorite of hers but somewhere that I had never been. I'll never forget how Kerr was able to put people at ease, and draw them in as friends!

The greatest gift that I received through working at Extend-A-Family was the appreciation for how important the people that we have supporting us are, and the understanding that everyone should have the encouragement necessary to be independent. The families that I worked with were always willing to discuss with me how the summer was going, and at times how we could make it even better. Through their support, for which I'm very thankful, I felt that I was able to share in some amazing summer experiences. The experiences that I had working with Extend-A-Family, the lessons that I learned and the relationships that I formed, will continue to enrich my life.

∞ Katie Pitts, Summer Student ∞

Lauren and Katherine

Lauren and Katherine met with an Extend-A-Family coordinator in June. They discussed goals for their time together, and talked about activities they both enjoyed. They planned trips to Ontario Place, the EX, and short trips around the neighbourhood using the TTC. Lauren also mentioned that she would like to get a job or volunteer somewhere near home.

Lauren and Katherine spent a fun week together at the beginning of the summer. In the last week of August, they set out a plan for the week. On the top of the list was just hanging out and having a great time. In the back of our minds was the possibility of a job search for Lauren.

Well, Katherine and Lauren sat down the first thing on Monday morning and drafted up a resume. Off they went to the Bloor West Village (on foot, for exercise). They went from shop to shop delivering resumes until they ran out. Their last stop was to Shoppers Drug Mart. The girl at the checkout took the resume and passed it on to the new store manager. I guess he liked the resume and quickly called to tell Lauren that he would like to set up an interview! Lauren, who always comes home wanting to know if anyone called, was ecstatic to learn that Shoppers Drug Mart had called. Lauren returned the call and, with Katherine's help, scheduled an appointment for the following day. When Katherine arrived on the big day, she and Lauren picked out the clothes she would wear, groomed, and rehearsed a mock interview. Then they set out for Shoppers. Katherine sat in on the interview and it went very well. Lauren had her own questions and although a little nervous, she was very poised. The manager was very impressed and stated that he wants the new store to be inclusive (like the Walmart model where he worked for many years). He said that after the grand opening, he would get back to Lauren one way or the other. At present we still have no news, but Lauren is waiting with great anticipation and asks every day if Shoppers has called. The new Beauty Boutique will also open soon, so we hope we will have good news for you; we'll keep you posted.

Katherine and Lauren had a great couple of weeks and it was so nice to see them hanging out like two typical girls. Katherine walked right into our lives as if we had known her forever. It was as if Lauren had a good friend coming to visit for a week. They had two fantastic weeks and hope that they can do it again next summer. Since Katherine is back at university, they are now keeping in touch by email. It was a great experience! Thank you Extend-A-Family.

∞ Susan Macijiwsky (Lauren's mother) ∞

The Gift of the Two Michaels

INTRODUCTION - Michael Bertossi was born on October 4, 1984. He and his parents, Adriana and Giacinto, joined Extend-A-Family in 1992-3. Michael passed away in February 2001 - forever missed, but always remembered by all who had the honour of knowing him. Michael Romanuk was born on August 21, 1999. He and his parents, Denyse Neagle and Thomas Romanuk, joined Extend-A-Family in July 2001. The Bertossi and Romanuk families got together as part of the Out of Home Respite Project through Extend-A-Family in November, 2002. The two families are neighbours, and the needs of their sons - almost identical . We greatly appreciate these two families agreeing to share their very personal stories and lives with us. It is because we, at Extend-A-Family, hold with utmost respect what relationships are all about, that we feel this is an extremely heartwarming story to share. In October 2003, we interviewed the two mothers for the newsletter.

Question : What are you receiving from this relationship?

ADRIANA - The physical care is not frightening for me because I've done it before and I can teach others. To keep on doing what I did with our Michael means I'm not wasting all the knowledge and experience I gained with our son. I can help another family, and give little Michael an extended family - my husband and father-in-law love him too. I believe that doing good is God's will; I feel valuable. I am who I am because of the gift of our son Michael. "I do whatever I can to honour my son - this is not a replacement for my Michael - each one is his own person. Our son taught my husband and I what was really important in life. Michael Romanuk is like a gift to us."

DENYSE - I have explored other types of respite , but I'm most comfortable leaving Michael with Adriana . I know she will take care of him the way I would. When Michael was in the hospital, Adriana and Giacinto came down to visit him. It was hard for them because they had been through it so many times with their son, but they came anyway. Adriana told me to take some time for myself, to get away from the hospital for a few hours. They would stay with Michael and they did. In Denyse 's own words: " I am glad Michael has Adriana." Sometimes I feel stressed looking after Michael's many needs so a break is nice once in awhile. I am now feeling more comfortable and much more secure leaving Michael with Adriana. She enjoys Michael and gives him love and affection. Adriana does not "work" with Michael. He becomes her focus, attention and interest.

Question : What has been difficult?

ADRIANA - In the beginning I was filled with many memories and it was difficult. Sometimes I doubted myself. Our two Michaels are so alike - sometimes the memories which were triggered overwhelmed me I miss our son so much. When things were not working with ' little ' Michael, I would think to myself - "I can't do it now; it only worked with my son." But, it's getting easier. When Michael Romanuk smiles - it's like a million-dollar gift and it doesn't feel difficult any more.

DENYSE - I was not comfortable at first. I was nervous about letting go / sharing the care of Michael / giving the responsibility to someone else. Now I'm very comfortable when he is with Adriana. Another thing which has been difficult is asking for help- even now. It's hard for me. I feel I'm imposing or 'bugging' people when I ask for help, but I'm learning.



Question : What have you learned from the relationship?

ADRIANA - Our two Michaels , although very similar , are not the same . They have their own personalities. It is my belief that nothing happens by coincidence. I am not doing this to become a “hero”. You do things in life under whatever conditions we are given. We learn from our children continually – both here and alive, and with those who have passed on . I am not substituting ‘little’ Michael for my son. ‘ My ‘ Michael loved physical contact, but ‘little’ Michael needs his own space. He comes home from school tired, and wants some physical separation. He wants to be put down on our son’s bed. He wants company though, someone to interact with him . He complains if he doesn’t get enough attention. He just doesn’t want to be held, at least for awhile. Over the years I have learned that the focus on ‘fixing’ our children may obscure the very precious gifts they bring to their family, friends, and community. This relationship reinforces acceptance.

DENYSE - I had always expected that family would help, but I didn’t think that someone outside the family would. What I’ve learned from the relationship with Adriana is that there are people who are not relatives who are more than willing to offer help and support. Their actions suggest to me that I matter, that Michael matters – and that we are important. Thank you, Adriana, for making a difference.

The Beginning of the End of Discrimination in Education? ~ A Parent’s Perspective ~

The Ontario Human Rights Code is supposed to protect people with disabilities who face discrimination when trying to access services such as education. It overrides all other legislation in the province (including the Education Act) except the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. So why does it feel like the education system is untouchable?

The protection that the Code provides is very broad and without tools to help us apply it to certain sectors such as employment and services, it is difficult to achieve change even though the basic protection exists.

The Ontario Human Rights Commission develops important policy based on the protection the Code is supposed to provide. The Commission has already developed very strong policy on disability entitled, Policy and Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate, that is supposed to apply to employment and services in Ontario. However, because this document is written mostly with employment in mind, there are no specific guidelines on how to apply its principles to education.

The other major function of the Commission is to investigate individual complaints of discrimination based on a ground protected by the Code, such as disability. In order for the Commission to properly investigate complaints and arrive at decisions that uphold the rights of those in need of protection, it is extremely important that it have available to it clear guidelines for application.

In July of 2002, with the goal of developing specific guidelines that apply to education, the Commission launched its largest consultation process undertaken to date on disability in education. It was launched in response at least in part, to the rising number of education-related complaints being filed by families. In October of 2003, the Commission released its report entitled, The Opportunity to Succeed, Achieving Barrier-Free Education for Students with Disabilities.

Although it is a huge disappointment that the actual guidelines have not yet been developed, (scheduled to be released as a ‘companion document’ to the report, by September 2004) the Commission has publicly committed to instituting a heightened state of compliance expectations until they are. This means that education-related complaints should now be investigated in a more swift and aggressive manner than has been the case to date as a result of the Commission’s improved understanding of discrimination issues in education.

The Commission will gauge compliance to the broad recommendations of the report regarding placement, services & accommodation, funding, training, attitudes and unfair systems by examining individual complaints that are filed after the education system has been duly advised from the top down. The report, which was released to the Ministry of Education prior to the public release on October 27th 2003, puts the education system on notice and places particular emphasis on the harm that the ‘Safe Schools Act’ has caused students.

Families can raise awareness from the bottom up and hopefully spare other families from the pain and anguish of litigation by calling on their local school councils and SEACs to begin a dialogue with educators on the report, its recommendations and the heightened state of compliance expectations. This is a time of new beginnings for Ontario and this report, though not all that we hoped it would be, is a step toward ending discrimination in education for our children.

∞ Kathie Brooks, Coordinator, Extend-A-Family ∞

Please visit the Ontario Human Rights Commission web site at www.ohrc.on.ca, to view the Ontario Human Rights Code, Policy & Guidelines on Disability and the Duty to Accommodate or The Opportunity to Succeed, Achieving Barrier-Free Education for Students with Disabilities report. To view the report on-line or for a printed copy, please visit Publications Ontario at www.gov.on.ca/MBS/english/publications/index.html or call the Commission at (416) 326-9511 (in Toronto), 1-800-387-9080 (toll-free), 1-800-308-5561 (TTY toll-free) or (416) 314-6526 (TTY local)

A Teacher Honoured

In May 2003, I nominated Ms. Lynda Mason, a Special Education Resource teacher at Givens Shaw Public School, for an Inclusive Education Award given by Community Living Toronto. My nomination was supported by letters from the parent and the principal of the school. The following includes excerpts from my nomination letter:

A family with whom I work asked Extend-A-Family to facilitate a circle of friends in the school attended by their daughter. Ms. Mason volunteered to co-lead the circle with me, and her help was invaluable because she knew the students so well. She seemed to have a finger on the 'pulse' of the circle. In the beginning we held joint meetings, then alternated every two weeks. She was sensitive to the fact that I needed to establish my own relationship with the students, so when it was 'my week', she did not stay for the meeting. I think the best way for me to present Ms. Mason as a candidate for the Inclusive Education Award is simply to outline the qualities of the holistic educator she is, which emerged in my relationship with her last year.

WARM AND CARING

The nurturing approach to her students was almost palpable in our joint circle meetings.

A SKILLED "MEDIATOR" Ms. Mason has worked very hard to increase understanding between parents and staff, thereby bringing their positions closer together.

OPEN TO NEW LEARNING AND PERSONAL GROWTH Many teachers in their final year are content to coast toward retirement. Not so Ms. Mason! In her last year of teaching, she took on a new challenge. Facilitating a circle of friends was a first for both of us.

CREATIVE AND RESOURCEFUL Ms. Mason demonstrated these qualities by researching books on social skill development and ordering them for the school. She requested ideas for activities, crafts and games from the Guide leader who is also a teacher at the school.

GENEROUS Ms. Mason shared any resources she had with me including: books, songs, games, stories, craft ideas and materials. Some of these I shared with the Extend-A-Family staff members who are involved with circles of friends in other schools. In this way, Ms. Mason's 'resourcing' had a wider ripple effect.

A TEAM PLAYER From the beginning we shared ideas and resources, occasionally 'piggy-backing' on projects. For example, at one meeting I had the students decorate picture frames. As a follow up, Ms. Mason took photos of each circle member which they put in their frames to give as gifts. On another occasion, I had made a poster displaying the students' first names and what each had said about friendship. Ms. Mason put the poster up on the bulletin board outside her classroom. I saw this as a way of both honouring the 'work' of the Circle, and 'spreading the word' to the school population at large.

Our nomination was selected, and on September 9, 2003, Ms. Lynda Mason received one of the Inclusive Education Awards at the Annual General Meeting of Community Living Toronto. Ms. Janet Duffy, the principal of Givens Shaw Public School, and I were on hand to congratulate Ms. Mason on this well deserved honour for a lifelong commitment to inclusive education.

P.S. - Ms. Mason is continuing the circle of friends this year as a volunteer.

∞ *Liz Short, Coordinator, Extend-A-Family* ∞



Parent Share

Extend-A-Family is involved in several Parent Groups throughout Metro. We have been successful in partnering with both Community Living Toronto and Montage Support Services. It is our belief that the more one feels connected and understood, the more connections their children will have. Our gatherings are informal, safe, and welcoming!

The following are just a few comments parents shared with us when recently asked:

- *“Why Bother Coming to a Group given you have extremely busy lives and schedules?”*
- *“I call it ‘talk therapy’ – and I often get to put myself in my child’s shoes. My child is unable to talk and I know he has so much to say – I can come here and talk about what’s bothering me and share with the other parents....he can’t do this”*
- *“I am taking time for myself”*
- *“People think I do nothing while my child is at school – they should only know what my day really looks like – every here understands this.”*
- *“I come away feeling good, relaxed, and validated”*
- *“I feel positive when I leave – I have permission to develop my sense of humour”*
- *“We collectively look for solutions”*
- *“My daughter is older and I don’t have many parent connections any more”*
- *“Sometimes I don’t have a context to compare my life with unless I am with other parents who share this experience”*
- *“This is like a centralized clearinghouse where we learn from each other what works and what doesn’t work. It is very empowering.”*
- *“I can be vulnerable and also reach out”*

The following are the locations for the Groups planned to date:

EAST: Every Thursday morning @ 9:30 –11:30 a.m. Beginning January 8th
 Cliffcrest United Church, 1 McCowan Rd. (at Kingston Rd.)
 For further information, please contact: Janice Mathews @ Extend-A-Family, 905-509-8494

CENTRAL: For further Information, please contact Linda Ger Walters @ Extend-A-Family, 416-651-2477

WEST: Every Thursday morning @ 9:30 –11:30 a.m. Beginning January 29th
 Community Living Etobicoke 295 The West Mall, Suite 204
 For Further Information, please contact Linda Ger Walters @ Extend-A-Family, 416-651-2477

FOR PARENTS with CHILDREN OVER 18:

We hold monthly meetings with our community partner, Montage Support Services. For further information, please contact, Linda Ger Walters @ Extend-A-Family, 416-651-2477

Upcoming Workshops

Special Education Committee	Feb. 05, 2004	Bruce Davis 416-393-1972
Life Skills and Community Resources	Feb. 11, 2004	www.respiteservices.com
Using the Law to Prevent a Crisis in the Education System	Feb. 23, 2004	Kathie Brooks 416-487-1505
Ritmik Drum & Percussion Workshops	2004 Ongoing	http://www.ritmik.biz/calendar.htm#5
Northern Roots: Nurturing Inclusive Communities	Apr. 20-21, 2004	Sandy Nicholson 705-789-4543 (Community Living Huntsville)

Big Heart Arts Therapy Studio

Providing Support and Healing Through the Arts

In our previous newsletter we advertised information about the Big Heart Arts Therapy Studio - here are a few testimonies from Extend-A-Family members.

My daughter loves doing painting with Cher. Going to Cher is one thing she always talks about and looks forward to. I feel fortunate to have found such a warm and caring art therapist for my daughter.

∞Anne Juroviesky ∞

I like working with Cher. It's like getting your feelings out. She's opened me up and really helped me.

∞ Anonymous Individual ∞

In the short time Cher has been working with my daughter Joanne, she has shown herself to be unfailingly perceptive and caring. Cheerful, creative and fun! She varies the activities she introduces and smoothly adapts to the mood of the moment without any apparent effort or fluster. Her sessions bring pleasure and already seem to be achieving improvements in self acceptance. She has been a blessing!

∞Aileen McColloch ∞

For more information go to www.bigheartstudio.com or call Cher at (416) 888-8852

Calling all TTC Lovers!

The Toronto Transit Society is a group of TTC enthusiasts who meet once a month, (every 2nd Monday evening at Metro Hall) September through June, to share their love of the transit. These meetings sometimes feature slide shows and quest speakers. Membership to the Society is \$25 per year and entitles members to attend monthly meetings and receive a monthly newsletter. Among the TTS' special events (which are optional), are periodical chartered bus, streetcar or subway rides. Tickets for these full day trips cost \$20 each. As well, the TTS holds an annual auction where TTC memorabilia can be traded and bid on. Besides those associated with bidding, there are no fees for attending the auction.

Our son, Julian is definitely an enthusiast and absolutely relishes his time with the TTS. At 9, he is the youngest member of the group whose members range in age right up until... The TTS has presented us with a great opportunity to honour Julian's zest for the transit and to send him a clear message that his interests are valued and shared.

The following is a link to the TTS website. During the writing of this article, they were experiencing some technical difficulties so should you require additional information about the TTS, please do not hesitate to call the number listed below it.

<http://tts.itgo.com/>

∞ Kathie Brooks, Coordinator, Extend-A-Family (416) 487-1505 ∞

Thank you for your contributions!

Charitable Registration Number 11890-4846-RR0001

Please make cheques payable to **Extend-A-Family** & mail to:

Extend-A-Family
200-3300 Yonge Street
Toronto ON M4N 2L6

For receipt purposes we require the following information:

Name _____ Tel: _____

Address _____