

BELIEVE

January 2013

EXTEND-A-FAMILY

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*A little bit of soul, a touch of Rock & Roll and
one just can't help believing. Theo at
Extend-A-Family's Annual General Meeting
Summer 2012*



extend a family

"The molecules of your body are the same molecules that make up the nebulae, that burn inside the stars themselves. We are star stuff." Victor Tenbaum

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A Message from Extend-A-Family's Executive Director

Often when people speak of their accomplishments, whether it is receiving a distinguished award, graduating or struggling through a challenging situation, they acknowledge that their success was in part due to knowing that someone believed in them; believed in their potential, encouraged them, challenged them and were their biggest cheerleader.

One of the greatest gifts a parent can give their child is the unwavering and unconditional belief in their abilities, strengths and gifts. Never underestimate how powerful the words "I believe in you" can be when spoken honestly and from the heart. When a child trusts that others believe in them, it lays the foundation for a strong sense of self worth, self esteem, pride and self-respect. When children believe in themselves, their hopes and dreams for the future become real possibilities.

Wishing everyone a Healthy and Happy New Year filled with the Love of Family and Friends

Anne Marie Cole

On Behalf of Extend-A-Family Board of Directors
GOOD ENOUGH

Two of the groups dearest to my heart are L'Arche and Extend-A-Family. Both speak the same message: you are good enough as you are. You are good enough as you are as a parent, you are good enough as you are as a person with a disability, you are good enough as you are as a friend, and you are good enough as you are as a board member.

Both groups say you belong as you are. You are good enough.

Both groups invite the community to open their hearts and see goodness, gifts, longing and belonging. All we have to do is truly believe that we are indeed good enough.

Extend-A-Family's role is to help us all belong and to help us all realize that together we are better. It is this belief that is at the heart of Extend-A-Family and if we truly believe the message we can change the world.

John Vanier, the founder of L'Arche, says that in order to belong "... it is important that we support each other, that we pray for each other, that we come together as people who have the same face."

Once again as our Annual Winter Gathering draws near please ask yourself if Extend-A-Family is a place of belonging for you and your family? Please ask yourself how you can support the Extend-A-Family staff. If you have the ability to listen, to learn, to be part of a team, please consider putting your name forth as willing to be a member of the board now or in the future.

Michele Schmidt

Extend-A-Family, Chairperson

Volunteering with Extend-A-Family – A Solid Friendship



Our solid friendship began when Jessica an Extend-A-Family Coordinator, introduced Ashley and me at her family's kitchen table. I still remember this same day doing the High School Musical dance with Ashley, and from there it was history. We are both family channel junkies and are up for any new adventure. Spending time with Ashley this summer is hard to put into words as it is indescribable. Whether it was the numerous jam sessions to the radio which was blaring on our way to the Etobicoke Humane Society, playing soccer on weeknights or making t-shirts in the park, it was never a dull moment. Ashley is a remarkable individual who has many wonderful qualities and talents that she brings to this world. She always put a smile on my face and is an amazing dancer, but more importantly, a fantastic drawer. I am very fortunate that I was able to meet Ashley through Extend-A-Family; Ashley has become a lifelong friend. Ashley is never afraid to be herself. Even though I attend the University of Guelph, I look forward to continuing my friendship with Ashley and sharing our new school adventures with one another. Ashley is a truly caring and passionate young lady who would do anything to

make you laugh. I still remember driving home from the Etobicoke Humane Society, listening to Michael Jackson's song, "Thriller" on the radio. We did a mash up together; she was the lead singer and I was singing the back up. Something so simple brought so many laughs and a memory for a lifetime. Our strong friendship is full of smiles; every time I go home, my cheeks hurt from laughing so much. I look forward in continuing to build our friendship, communicating via long distance, while I am at school. We will definitely spend more time together when I am back in Toronto. Thank you Extend-A-family, especially Jessica, for this amazing opportunity!

Pamela D'Ambrogio
(Volunteer Host)



Planning for Inclusive Education:
Avoiding Dangerous Assumptions - A Perspective from Parents

Our daughter has been included in a regular classroom at a neighbourhood school since Grade 1 as we believe it is the best for her and meets her needs. Transitioning from middle school to high school this year prompted us to review the placement situation and it reconfirms our belief.

We have thought long and hard about what is in the best interest of our daughter as she develops from a little girl to an adult. Up to now, through the various stages of our daughter's development, we have been using the model "Framework For Accomplishment" developed by John O'Brien to determine our daughter's needs. There are 5 Essential Values in this framework. They are:

1. People
2. Places
3. Choices
4. Respect
5. Skills

This framework is one of the tools that we often rely on to determine what our daughter's needs are and what is best for her.

Taking these five essential values and applying them on to our daughter's placement decision, we come up with the following conclusions:

- People – It is extremely important that our daughter be placed with kids that she grew up with. This includes her classmates and friends who knew her from the middle school and her neighbourhood. They are kids in the same age group and they live in the same community. These are the people that our daughter can build communication and friendships with as she grows within this community. This relates to "work, further education and community living" as stipulated according to the Education Act Regulation 181 (Section 6-8).
- Places – The regular class placement at our daughter's neighbourhood school can help to maintain her sense of belonging. As most of us know belonging leads to learning. Her neighbourhood school will provide continuous mutual support from students in her community.
- Choices – In making decisions about our daughter's life and her education, we also follow the advice in Anne Donnellan's article of "What is the Least Dangerous Assumption." She advises parents that in "Making Educational decisions that will have the least dangerous consequences for the students, should we ever be proven wrong." With regard to this, we have spoken to many families who have gone through a similar decision making process and without exception, every parent said if they were allowed to decide again they would have placed their children in a regular class setting. Clearly, the choice of the regular class placement can best serve our daughter's needs as it appears to have the least dangerous consequences.

Continues on page 5

- Respect - We feel very strongly that “we have to speak for our daughter until she can speak for herself.” It would be criminal if we don’t speak out about the choice of placement that is in the best interest of our daughter. Speaking out for her best interest is the least we have to do for our daughter.
- Skills – We keep posing the question such as: where will our daughter get the role modeling that would help her learn, both academically and socially? An even more pressing issue is, where and how will our daughter acquire the social skills which will enable her to connect to her community? The regular class placement would undoubtedly provide the most appropriate role modeling for her. Looking back at her years in school, we think the best gift that the school has provided our daughter is her connection to her classmates, friends and community.

In addition to using John O’Brien’s framework of needs identification, recently, we have started a more formal planning process for our daughter. This is to plan for our daughter’s future. We organized a group of people that are interested in the well being of our daughter. We used a tool called PATH to guide us in this process.

- We brainstormed to come up with ideas by asking questions like: “if we could wish upon a star, what would we wish for our daughter.” What do you think she would wish for herself? What are some of the things that are important to our daughter? What are the things she enjoys? What are some of the key words and images that are expressed in the dream? As in the dream, there is no limit but our imagination. It is within the dream where we find the seeds of the future.
- We then surveyed to find out the strengths of our daughter from the people who interact with our daughter such as her piano teacher, tutors, nanny, psychologist, occupational therapist, and her friends. There are strengths that we all agreed upon. We are also pleasantly surprised and encouraged by some of the improvements our daughter made in her middle school years.
- We also looked into the possible nightmares.

As a result of this process, we find that to achieve our daughter’s dream, an important goal is to have an appropriate high school education. The goal for this year is to have a successful transition from middle school to high school.

Summing up our evaluation, we strongly believe that that it is the best for our daughter to continue with regular class placement in her neighbourhood school with appropriate accommodations. We believe this is the best option which can meet her needs and help her to fulfill her dream.

We understand that we will continue to meet challenges that frequently test our belief. However, each time we go back to the John O’Brien’s framework where People and Places are on top of the list, our belief is strengthened.

Eric & Betty

When someone shows you who they are, believe them the first time.`` - .Oprah Winfrey

The World Has a Lot to Learn From Inclusion

Regent Heights Public School is a growing JK-Gr8 school in Toronto. We are made up of students and families from many cultures and a large percentage of our families have a first language other than English. We pride ourselves in finding ways to be inclusive of all of our students and their families and do our best to acknowledge cultural celebrations throughout the school year. We start each year with a 'Welcome Back BBQ' and end the school year with a school Musical or Community Fair and a 'Volunteer Tea' to bring together the community and recognize the many parents and community volunteers who support our students and staff throughout the year.

We have come a long way in recognizing that learning about other cultures brings richness to our lives. An understanding of the similarities and differences in our beliefs and traditions adds to our knowledge and cultivates respect. I always loved the analogy of making a stew when speaking about diversity because a stew maintains its individual ingredients while creating a wonderful dish that otherwise couldn't exist.

Where we often falter in building inclusive schools is in recognizing the benefits of including students with disabilities. For years we have heard that meeting the needs of many special needs students in their home schools takes away from the learning of other students in the school because they require more attention from the classroom teachers and school administration. With the support of school support staff, and a belief that everyone has the potential to be a contributing member of a school community, wonderful learning can happen. Advances in technology and educational software are also helping educators to plan and meet the individual needs of all students; however, it all starts with attitude and teamwork - a belief that it takes a village to raise a child.

Three students and their respective families at Regent Heights P.S., have taught many of us more than we can ever hope to teach them! Jake is in grade 8 and has Autism. Hamsa is in grade 3 and has Autism. Mohammad is in grade 1 and has a physical disability. Although staff members have expressed varying degrees of comfort in planning for inclusion of these students in the regular classroom, staff who have embraced inclusion, like parents of these same children, will tell you that they and the other students in the class have benefitted as much from the experience as Jake, Hamsa and Mohammad. We benefit from the inclusion of all students because it builds our awareness; our fears are replaced with the understanding that everyone is different and everyone has feelings, strengths and needs. Inclusion embraces our differences and our similarities.

Hamsa's grade 1 teacher embraced having Hamsa in her class, but was nervous about how she would address his needs and the needs of the rest of her grade 1/2 class. How would she communicate information to Hamsa and how would he communicate his needs to her and his classmates? It was a two year process and her fears have been replaced with confidence.

With the assistance of a support person and an Individual Education Plan (IEP) that addressed Hamsa's learning needs he gradually settled in to his classroom and became a contributing member. Not only did he benefit from being included, so did his teachers and classmates. The school worked together with a community partner, Puzzle Pieces, to build a program that is implemented at home and school to support Hamsa's learning. Students were peer role models while at school. Their knowledge about Autism increased and they had some opportunities to use the communication board which enhanced the interactions between Hamsa, his classmates and the teacher.

Continues on page 8

Student peer tutors thoroughly mastered the academic concepts. It improved the ability of the students and the classroom teacher to adapt different teaching methods and learning styles. Hamsa's presence pushed his teacher to integrate more visuals, concrete materials, and technology in her lessons, benefitting all students in her class resulting in a greater academic outcome. For instance, certain sensory needs had to be met for Hamsa.

He was sensitive to sound, so as a class, they modified certain classroom routines to lower the overall noise level in the classroom. This greatly helped with classroom management, as students were better able to concentrate, hear their peers and the teacher.

During Mohammad's first two years of school in kindergarten, inclusion was relatively simple. With the support of an educational assistant, Mohammad could easily be assisted during transitions and during gym or at outdoor play time. When Mohammad entered grade 1 this year, we quickly realized that adapting to Grade 1 without an education assistant and navigating his new world which was now a full school day including an hour and a half of outdoor time in the Grade 1-8 school yard, was going to be a challenge. Mohammad was sad and often in tears at recess, because his friends ran off to play tag and soccer, but he was afraid so he sat on the bench. When it was suggested that perhaps Mohammad's needs would be better supported in an ISP class elsewhere, a unanimous cry went up, "Mohammad belongs here!".

A teacher at the school sat with Mohammad for a few days and had the brilliant idea to find an activity that Mohammad would be comfortable playing outside and could include other students – sand toys! Another staff member had a collection of dump trucks and tractors which she donated and Mohammad's outdoor time was transformed. Within two short weeks Mohammad was comfortable enough to bring his soccer ball and now he and his friends alternate between soccer and sand play. Mohammad is about to begin his own 'Friendship Circle' which will allow him and his peers to continue to build friendships that will extend outside the classroom and into the greater school community.

An educational assistant who has known Jake since Grade 1 comments, 'I always like to remember Jake when I first met him in Grade 1. A friendship circle was formed, like a club, at lunch. Everyone in his class wanted to be in the club. Seven years on, Jake still maintains his friendship through the friendship circle. Together the friendship circle learned compassion and understanding for others and their differences. I have worked at several schools and have never seen such open acceptance and kindness. I have witnessed it in the halls, the classroom and at school assemblies. When Jake walks the halls with his beaming smile, you can't help but think how lucky we are to have him in our school, his presence makes us all better human beings; because of him we all make a difference.'

As Jake is getting ready to transition from Grade 8, we are all trying to prepare. This morning in our Nutrition Room, Jake was helping prepare snack with fellow students, staff and parent volunteers. It made me feel both sad and happy as I heard him say to the Nutrition Program Parent Coordinator, "I'm going to high school next year. I'm going to come and visit you and help." I think we've found Jake's Community Service Volunteer hours for high school – I hope so!

My hope for the future lies with our children. Our kids have a lot to teach us about inclusion, acceptance and expectations or limitations we place on individuals, but our kids rely on us to lead by example. With the support of staff, parents and learning resources, inclusion is a very real possibility and a benefit to all members of our school community.

Nancy Keenan
(Principal)



Regent Heights has taken on an anti bullying campaign with the message – “Not In Our Community - Regent Heights Believes....” With schools believing in their students, one Friendship Circle described what this means to them.

I can be:

- Me
- Successful
- Friendly
- Unique
- Creative
- Respectful
- Trustworthy
- Empowering
- Bold and Positive

Book Review

Carly's Voice: Breaking Through Autism By Arthur Fleischmann with Carly Fleischmann© 2012

I literally devoured this book from cover to cover; Mr. Fleischmann is a man with the gift of writing. It is clear from the get-go that he and his wife love their family, sharing the triumphs and trials as they raise their 3 children, Matthew, Taryn and Carly. Carly, among other diagnoses, has autism and with support, found a way to communicate by typing, one key at a time. Without the belief from family and support workers Carly may still be “silent,” her inner most thoughts quelled. For those who have raised children, you will empathize with the fact that your child with special needs may not be included in ordinary things like being invited to birthday parties. Carly fights to fit in, to communicate and her parents’ battles were of a different nature but just as constant ... finding the right support workers, navigating the medical system, the school system.

In many respects, Carly is a typical teenager, who wants to experience usual stuff. Recently, I joined Carly's facebook page and the week that this review was being authored, she shared that she will be ordering a pizza, for the first time ever. How cool is that?

Carly is a teacher and really wants to help others understand what she and other kids with autism experience and feel. She wrote a chapter in the book. “A wise man once told me that a seed needs love and nurturing to become a flower and a caterpillar needs time and persistence to become a beautiful butterfly. So that’s why I say everyone has an inner voice that is waiting to come out and all they need is you.” Thank you for sharing your voice, Carly!

Cate Downey

The Power of Reaching Out by Kim Southern Paulsen

Regent Heights Public School will hold a special place in my heart as we approach a big transition year – moving on to high school and moving on to another school community! Way back we took a chance and chose our neighbourhood school and the regular class for our son. We believed the best place for him was in our community. We really had no idea what would unfold. The results have been unbelievable, really. It cannot be understated; the value of creating a warm and welcoming environment within a school community. It really is quite amazing to be in the middle of it all and being a participant while everything began to unfold. There have been times where it has been quite challenging; it is not perfect as you have to continually adjust to the needs of the people within. An inclusive school is continually finding ways to engage everyone in different ways; staff, students, parents and community members. Patrick Schwarz, author of *Disabilities to Possibilities*, states “inclusion is not easier, but it is better.” We often think of school issues just being about classrooms, students and teachers. Parents play an important role and can be partners in all this. One way is through reaching out to your community. After all, inclusion isn’t just about “me,” it is about all of us. In recent years, our school grew as a community because of this welcoming attitude. There was a desire amongst school staff and a committed group of parents to reach out to various cultures and expand our knowledge and understanding of the diversity within our school community. That involved parents and staff making an intentional effort to meet and chat with other parents and students, to get an understanding of their interests, talents and what was important to them. This meant finding ways to bring parents in to our school and participate as a meaningful, valued member of our community. It is not as easy as it sounds. We did a number of things over the past few years. One was using food as the common thread. Our school council always provided a staff appreciation lunch. We enlisted a few parents whose passion is FOOD and they broadly invited parents to participate in a parent-hosted potluck lunch for our school staff in appreciation of all their kindness, caring and dedication to the well being and education of our children. This potluck has been renamed over the past couple of years as the Annual Cultural Potluck Staff Appreciation Lunch. Each year more parents participate. It builds a positive framework for staff to see parents and parents to see staff, not to mention the pride the students feel when they see their moms and dads “breaking bread” with their teachers and Principal!

We have found ways to bring more parents into our school and promote an awareness of our differences through various activities. An example would be hosting a Henna Day in recognition of Eid. We have extremely talented parents/Henna Artists in our community and they are invited to come in and share their talent with the school community, while mentoring some of our intermediate students to be exposed to the art.

All of these activities bring down the barriers that may prevent us from reaching out to one another. We see each other as human with many different talents and we have the opportunity to chat with one another to acknowledge we are all in this together, we have the power to make our community stronger, safer and a better place to live. As a parent, it has given me opportunity to meet and connect with parents I would not have known; it has given my kids the opportunity to know these parents too and have a greater appreciation of diversity in our community. It has allowed our family to casually demonstrate diversity in even a broader context which includes varying abilities, and different ways of communicating. My son has benefitted greatly from these activities, as more people know him, and see him as another student at Regent Heights; his network is broader and richer because of this, as is theirs. We know our support is far reaching and we also support many in our community too. Isn’t that what community and inclusion is all about?

Nawin on the Summer Institute hosted by Inclusion Press

Hi my name is Nawin Mutti. I'm in my 5th year of high school at Emery Collegiate Institute.

In the summer of 2012, I went to the Toronto Summer Institute. This is an international conference on leadership and inclusion. It was a 6 day conference and to get there I had to take a one and a half hour subway ride there and back ... and it was worth every second of it! I actually left home early to get downtown so I could enjoy the Ryerson University grounds and be with people from the conference.

During my time there I met so many friendly people and people who were very connected and educated in the fields I would like to pursue in my future, which led to numerous great conversations.

To this day, I am still connected with them. There were youth I met at the Re:Action4Inclusion Conference who also attended the Toronto Summer Institute. It was great to be able to connect more with them. The conversations I had with people varied between love, relationships, work, life, etc. I was reminded of the capacity of people to be loving, nurturing and believing in one another. During the first couple of hours at the conference everyone felt like individuals but as the week went on we felt more and more like brothers and sisters.

If there is one thing I learned from the sessions I attended, it would be from the Mindfulness Sessions facilitated by Alan Sloan. What I took from Alan is when you encounter conflict to remember to slow down, step back, breath in and out and think about the situation. Your mind reacts without thinking about it and by training your mind on these three steps. 1) focus 2) collect 3) calm, you will eventually be able to use these skills more mindfully in the future.

Overall the conference was wonderful and I would suggest it to anyone. This conference has no boundaries and invites and welcomes everyone in.

I would like to thank Extend-A-Family for the opportunity.

I will remember this conference for my whole life and I am really grateful to Extend-A-family for believing in me and encouraging me to take action in my life and in my future.

Nawin Mutti



THE VALUES OF INCLUSION

Everyone is born in

We are all born as equal citizens and part of a community, we are only later excluded.

All means all

Everyone capable of breathing, even if breathing requires support, is entitled to be included - no-one is too difficult, too old, too poor or too disabled to qualify.

Everyone needs to be in

If people are physically excluded, they have to be physically included. Judith Snow talks about presence being the first criteria for inclusion - if you're not there, no-one will know you're missing.

Everyone needs to be with

Being there is necessary - but being with takes time and effort. A community is not just a locality - it is a network of connections and relationships. We have to help people be part of and belong to communities, not just be lonely residents within them or day visitors to them.

Everyone is ready

No-one has to pass a test or meet a set of criteria to be eligible - everyone is ready to be part of community now and it is community's task to find ways of including them.

Everyone needs support - & some need more support than others

No-one is fully independent and independence isn't our goal. We are working towards interdependence and differing degrees and kinds of support at different times.

Everyone can communicate

Just because someone can't or won't use words to communicate doesn't mean that they don't have anything to say - everyone can communicate and we have to work harder at hearing, seeing, understanding and feeling what people are communicating to us and communicating back.

Everyone can learn

We believe that everyone should be given the opportunity to learn new things, grow as individuals and develop to their full potential. Everyone can learn and we can all become better teachers.

Everyone can contribute

Each person has their own gifts and strengths - and each person has a unique contribution to make. Our task is to recognize, encourage and value each person's contribution - including our own!

Together we are better

We do not believe the world would be a better place if everyone is the same. We are not dreaming of a world when all differences are eradicated and all disabilities are cured - we believe that diversity does bring strength and that we can all learn and grow by knowing one another.

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Friendship Circle Updates

The Extend-A-Family Award of Inclusion is an annual award recognizing the outstanding work that identified schools have done in the area of inclusion, friendship building and partnership. The Award of Inclusion is given to schools that support Extend-A-Family's efforts in developing circles of friends and inclusion for the students who attend that school.

Congratulations to the recipients of the 2011-2012 Award of Inclusion!

Cummer Valley Middle School

Muirhead Public School

St. Luke Catholic School

R.H. McGregor Elementary School



Stella Maris Catholic School Celebrates Friendship

Stella Maris Catholic School and Extend-A-Family have been coming together for over 3 years with a common belief that everyone belongs together and friendship is important to all students.

Students have been returning to the friendship circle year after year. It continues to be a safe space for students to come, share and play. Each person in the group is unique and we celebrate individuality by exploring their similarities and differences, dreams and themselves. The students have enjoyed getting to know each other while doing various crafts like mask making, "mancala boards," painting pictures, playing outdoors and in the gym with hoops and ribbons and balls, playing "bop-it," and simply talking over lunch.

They have explored different ways they communicate and connect with each other. Last June, students shared how they know someone is a friend: "they smile at you, they look you in the eye, they laugh with you, they hug you, and we play together." Students shared how each of these can be expressed without speaking. The students in the friendship circle at Stella Maris are not only making great memories together, but also making lasting friendships!

Denlow Public School & R. J. Lang Elementary & Middle School, Friendship Circles

Denlow and R. J. Lang Schools have been very welcoming and open to encouraging students to participate in friendship circles. Students from the grade one and two classes are learning about taking turns, respect, sharing, listening and other character building qualities. The school's staff has been supportive and encouraging of Extend-A-Family's focus of participation and building community.

A Message on Friendship Circles from Principal Laurie Levay of Holy Angels Catholic School

Full integration and acceptance of students with special needs has been our vision at Holy Angels Catholic School for many years. Extend-A-Family's friendship circles have been partnering with Holy Angels Catholic School for over nine years. The friendship circles were instrumental in developing social skills with students in our Multiple Exceptionalities class when it was first implemented. Recently, the friendship circles have been pivotal in developing social skills with our students with Autism Spectrum Disorders exceptionalities. Many students who are on Individual Education Plans (IEPs) need support with relationship building and interpersonal skills. The friendship circles have been instrumental in developing conversation skills, life skills (cooking, baking, etc), turn taking and friendship skills. Many of these students are given the opportunity to interact with other peers with whom they would not ordinarily do so. For the non-exceptional students, they are given an opportunity to develop leadership skills and act as role models. The benefits of this type of program in a school like Holy Angels where full integration is the norm, is incredible. The effect is evident throughout the entire school where tolerance, acceptance, patience, understanding and empathy are the norms. All successes are celebrated. The school community, parents, students and staff, are grateful to the support for Extend-A-Family's friendship circles and hope this partnership continues for many more years. A very special thank you to Sharon Power for her leadership and support over the years.

Principal Laurie Levay
(Holy Angels Catholic School)

Fun, Friendship and Time to Hang Out at R.H. McGregor Friendship Circle

R.H. McGregor Public School has welcomed the friendship circle for the past five years. We had a great time meeting outside of school at Playground Paradise. Parents and kids were there and everyone had a lot of fun! Later in the spring, our plan for a scavenger hunt and hike was rained out. So we all went to one of the kids' homes and played games, had some snacks and hung out. Our Friendship circle is growing! We are looking forward to planning time outside of school again this year!

Some of the friendship circle members shared

"It's fun!" L.R.

"I wanted to try it out." A.B.

"It is time to play with my friends and to get to know others better." T.T.

"It's something to do at lunch and I am glad it's happening again." G.O.





<p>Adult Sibling Support Group Location: Extend-A-Family Day: once a month Time: 7.00 – 9.00 PM Contact: Jessica Email: jvw@extendafamily.ca</p> <p>Phone: 416 4841317</p>	
<p>Dads' Group Location: Extend-A-Family Main Office Day: last Tuesday of each month Time: 7:00 – 9:00 PM Contact: Salvatore Email: sr@extendafamily.ca</p> <p>Phone: 416 484 1317</p>	<p>Safe & Secure Futures Network (West Region) Location: Royal York Road United Church Day: First Monday evening of every month Time: 7:00 – 9:00 PM Contact: Sharon Email: ssfnw@extendafamily.ca</p> <p>Phone: 416 484 1317</p>
<p>North East Support Group Location: members' homes Day: Tuesdays – once a month Time: 9:30 -11:30 AM Contact: Selena Email: sb@extendafamily.ca</p> <p>Phone: 416 484 1317</p>	<p>West Parents Support Group Location: Long Branch Baptist Church Day: Every other Wednesday Time: 9:30 – 11:30 AM Contact: Sharon Email: sp@extendafamily.ca</p> <p>Phone: 416 484 1317</p>
<p>Mom's Morning Out East Support Group Location: Cedarbrook Community Centre Day: Every other Thursday Time: 9:30 -11:30 AM Contact: Lee Email: ls@extendafamily.ca</p> <p>Phone: 416 4841317</p>	<p>Youth Sibling Support Group Location: Extend-A-Family Main Office Day: last Thursday of each month Time: 6:30 – 8:30 PM Contact: Jessica and Salvatore Email: jvw@extendafamily.ca or sr@extendafamily.ca</p> <p>Phone: 416 4841317</p>
<p>East Toronto Parent Support Group Location: Corvette Public School Day: every other Tuesday evening Time: 7:00 – 8:30 PM Contact: Kim Email: ksp@extendafamily.ca</p> <p>Phone: 416 484 1317</p>	<p>Safe & Secure Futures Network (Central & East Region) Location: St. Simon the Apostle Anglican Church Day: First Tuesday evening of every month Time: 7:00 – 9:00 PM Contact: Anne Email: ssfne@extendafamily.ca</p> <p>Phone: 416 484 1317</p>

Exciting Happenings & Updates

MARK YOUR CALENDARS!

Tuesday January 29, 2013
Extend-A-Family presents
an interactive parent workshop

“Building a Context for Relationships”

*Facilitated by Janet Kleese
See flyer for full details*

***“We cannot create relationship,
but we can recognize, encourage, and
design opportunities in which the
miracle of relationship is more likely
to occur.”***

by Janet Kleese

Transition Planning Workshop *Facilitated by Extend-A-Family*



***What's Next?
Planning for Life after High School for
your Son/Daughter.***

Dates to be determined

For Further Information Contact:
Sharon ssfnw@extendafamily.ca
or Anne ssfne@extendafamily.ca



Extend-A-Family's **Winter Gathering** will be on February 3, 2013 at 1 pm at St. Clements Church.

If you'd like to participate in our talent Show or share some of your art works please contact Salvatore at sr@extendafamily.ca to register.

See flyer for further information.

Sexuality Workshop

Sexuality and healthy relationships are an integral part of each person's life, regardless of our ability, talent or orientation. Each year Extend-A-Family hosts a workshop for people between 9 and 15 years of age. This provides our young people and their parents an opportunity to share common concerns and have conversations about sexuality and healthy relationships.



Extend-A-Family will be hosting an information evening in March 2013 for parents only, of young adults who are 16 years and over. You may contact Ruth at rf@extendafamily.ca or the main office at 416-484-1317 or info@extendafamily.ca for further information.

Education Corner

Parental Involvement and Becoming a Partner in Your Child's Education

Parents have the ability to be the drivers of their children's education.

As with all things education, do not approach it as a fight, keep your child at the centre of all discussions and maintain the belief you are a valuable partner in your child's education.

An African proverb says "when elephants fight the grass gets trampled."

A few tips to consider:

- Have a vision; short term and long term, it will help you and your child find the right path to travel and it will help the school understand your goals for your child. Remember parents are allowed to be optimistic and hopeful for their child's future! Think BIG!
- Be informed; know the Education Act, know special education policies both Ministry of Education and for your school board. Know the "must haves" versus the guidelines!
- Attend workshops, on-line forums hosted by reputable agencies and associations covering information concerning special education, advocacy or inclusive education.
- Be familiar with the Ontario Guidelines on Accessible Education.
- Check your attitude! A positive and respectful attitude is always helpful. You set the tone as needed.
- Be PERSISTENT in a positive manner.
- Consider collaboration and co-operation. Always try to frame things as win-win situations. You are concerned for your child but if it can benefit the whole class, it may be more readily received.
- Attempt to have school staff understand your goals and your child's needs and how to support them.
- Be creative in the manner in which your child will be supported. As education budgets shrink, we will all be faced with finding alternative ways for support.
- Aim for the least restrictive environment and the least dangerous assumptions, encourage others to think the same way.
- Identify what is positive and possible.
- Be grateful for what is going well and work hard to identify them and acknowledge appropriately.
- Refuse to accept no or can't; ask "what will it take?" Clarify with the school – "if you have exhausted your ability to help us, please direct us to the person who has the authority to assist us".
- Develop a solution based position; aim to be a partner in your child's education.
- Consider getting involved in your child's school. Volunteering in the school for special events may provide an opportunity for you to see your child interacting with a variety of people. You may be pleasantly surprised. It is also an opportunity to meet other students who may have a shared interest or are friends with your child! You will meet other parents furthering your network as well.

Get in the habit of sending thank you notes to teachers and principals and consultants for meeting with you. In the thank you note, capture what has happened in the meeting as a documented summary and highlight the actions noted in the meeting.

Be familiar with your school board's Parents Concern Policy.

It provides a guide on how to escalate a concern. Always start with the teacher if the issue is in the classroom. Often, polite and positive conversations can be effective.

Home-school communication

Finding a way to communicate with your child's teacher can be very challenging. Some teachers are welcoming and will always make time to speak with you. While others are busy and may not have the time, that doesn't mean they don't want to communicate.

Try speaking to your child's teacher, asking them what works well for them, what is the best way to communicate questions or information? Maybe it is a quick word at the end or the beginning of the day. Maybe it is using a communication book. Or maybe an email is preferred.

The best way to determine this is by asking and establishing a mutual means of communication.

If you decide to use a communication book, you may want to consider creating a check list; identify your top 5 concerns about your child in school.

Frame it in the positive, this really helps if staff are looking for all the good things your child is doing, they will enjoy their presence in the class much better than looking for the negatives.

Some examples might be:

- Participates in circle time.
- Raises hand to answer questions.
- Contributes in history class.
- Engaged in play with a classmate.
- Joined a peer group at recess.
- Greets teacher and two classmates.
- Able to move from class to library with support.

Staff become aware of what they are looking for, and will mark with a check mark if it was noted. If something out of the ordinary occurred they may add their own notes on the page too.

Some students may be able to complete their own activity log.

Have a collection of pictures of different activities through the school day or written words.

The student would circle or check or highlight the response.

The teacher may add a few comments to the day and voila! You now have an idea of what happened at school today instead of "nothing" or "I don't know!" that your child may tell you when you ask.

In addition to this intentional communication, don't forget to be polite and respectful in your conversations with the teacher. If you are pleased with the current situation, communicate that to the teacher and the Principal.

Everyone needs to feel appreciated.

Be prepared to not have information every single day.

Be confident the school will contact you too if they feel they need more information or if something isn't quite right or if your child had an outstanding day!

Establish a quick way to alert the school if there is a significant change they need to be aware of. Is that an email to the Principal? The teacher? A phone message?

Find out from the school what works best.

Everyone is busy, from parents to teachers, students and Principals. Most people want to work together and everyone wants to see all students be successful. Take the first step!



New Staff Member

Hello, my name is Lee Steel and I am very excited to be the coordinator covering for Tamara Bailey while she is on maternity leave. I am the proud parent of two young adults. As a child, my son was diagnosed with Autism and so I bring personal understanding and experience to this role. Our family was a member of Extend-A-Family, so I know firsthand the incredible impact this organization can make in a family's life. For the past 10 years, I was the Parent Liaison at the Autism Research Unit at the Hospital for Sick Children. For 4 years, I performed a similar role in the diverse multi-cultural community of St. Jamestown in Toronto. I believe we all have a desire to be appreciated for our uniqueness and have a sense of belonging in our communities. It is a great privilege for me to be able to accompany families along their journey, to help create connections for inclusion in their community, and to share the incredible strengths and gifts individuals with disabilities have to contribute to our society. **New**



Members and Hosts

A warm welcome to Extend-A-Family's newest members and volunteer hosts. We hope that you benefit from your connections with Extend-A-Family and look forward to a lasting relationship with all of you. To find out more about applying for membership or volunteering with Extend-A-Family visit our website at www.extendafamily.ca or contact the main office at 416 484 1317.



Re:action4inclusion Conference

March 1 – 3, 2012

Ensuring students who have intellectual disabilities don't get left behind.

A conference for High School Students.

YMCA Geneva Park, 6604 Rama, RR6 Orillia

For more information contact:

www.communitylivingontario.ca

Linda White 1 800 278 8025 x 239

Reflections from the Youth Sibling Group at Extend-A-Family

The Youth Sibling Support Group is a place for sibling's ages 10-15 yrs old, to come together and connect, share, support one another, meet other siblings and have fun!

The group started in 2011, and has been a staying power among the youth attending. Each month the participants feel more comfortable with each other, share their experiences and have great fun. They support each other the best way they can and allow themselves to share their frustrations, joys and how they cope from day to day.

When asked the following questions they replied:

"What are positive memories of being in the Sib group?"

"Meeting new people, laughing together and having fun."

"What do you get out of it?"

"How to best support myself and my siblings, sharing their personalities, and feeling like I am not alone."

"Do you feel it helps to talk about your siblings?"

All say, "YES!"

They expressed that being able to talk with other siblings helps to understand more about their own situations at home with their siblings and it's useful to share other strategies from their experiences. Overall, they all feel that the Youth Sibling Group is a positive place where they can feel safe to express their feelings, relate and support each other.

We invite you to join us in the New Year!



commence'13

CHARTING A COURSE FOR LIFE AFTER SCHOOL

JANUARY 23 & 24 • Sheraton Parkway, Toronto North

FOR MORE INFORMATION

PLEASE CONTACT US

Telephone: 416-447-4348 EXT 236

Toll Free: 1-800-278-8025 EXT 236

E-mail: mentoing@communitylivingontario.ca

West Parent Support Group

Meets every two weeks at Long Branch Baptist Church and is an opportunity for parents to meet, share and support one another.



Members of the West Parent Support Group enjoy a brief sojourn at Famous People Players as an end of year activity 2012.

Reflection from the East Evening Parent Group

"Chatting with other parents at the Extend-A-Family East Toronto Parent Support Group is like an alternative form of education – 'Chatucation,' where every parent feels support from each other. I learn how we each bring our individual strengths to being parents. The most recent time I attended, I listened to a parent and noticed how fast this parent moved to make changes and get things into place for their child. My own style is to take things slow – but I was reminded that sometimes, it would be better for me to listen to my gut feeling, pay attention to my child." A.B., (parent member)

The East Evening Parent Group is a time for parents and guardians to come together, share, gather strength, listen to different perspectives and discover new creative ideas. We have changed locations and are settled in Corvette Public school. We meet every other Tuesday evening from 7- 8:30 p.m. Please contact Kim ksp@extendafamily.ca for more information.

"Believe in yourself and there will come a day when others will have no choice but to believe with you." - Cynthia Kersey

Extend-A-Family, Summer Student Program



Each year Extend-A-Family provides our young people the support of youth to participate in Toronto camps or neighbourhood community experiences via our summer student program. This past summer Extend-A-Family hired 11 university and college students for this role.

It was an enriching experience for the children and youth as well as the students who supported them. People were able to enjoy swimming, trips downtown, the Science Centre, volunteering at the Scarborough Museum, outdoor theatre performances, summer camps or hanging out together listening to music and enjoying a popsicle on a hot day. Mutual learning was certainly a big part of the experience.

If your son or daughter would like to enjoy the summer with the support of a summer student and is 20 years of age or under, and you are actively partnering with Extend-A-Family throughout the year to build relationships, and pending funding availability, he or she is eligible to participate. Applications go out to families in February each year. The family, Extend-A-Family and the student partner together to make the young person's week of summer an inclusive and fun experience.

Reflections on the Summer Student Program

Having had the opportunity to work with great children and youth through Extend-A-Family has allowed me to be part of the lives of some fabulous kids. I have worked for Extend-A-Family as a summer student on two occasions supporting children and youth in camp and community settings and have nothing but good experiences to share. I learned so much about the children/youth and was given the opportunity to help them grow within their community. They taught me so many new things and allowed me to look at the world from a different perspective. Although I did not spend a long period of time with the youth I was able to develop great relationships with them and even had the chance to continue working with some of them after the summer was over. One of the families I worked with hired me to support some a youth I supported during the year. In addition, I had the chance to co-facilitate an inclusion group, friendship circle, which allowed children for a time during their busy school schedule to sit down and interact with their peers. I had such an amazing experience working with all the children in this group and seeing the impact great friendships can have on children with and without disabilities. Extend-A-Family does a great job at providing children and youth and their families with all different kinds of supports and resources. I was very fortunate to be part of this initiative.

Andrea Jaramillo

Jillian Cook's Path of Discovery

As Jillian becomes an adult her family and friends have recognized the need to come together and support her to continue to experience an active and bright future. Her support circle and important people in her life came together and participated in a PATH. A PATH means **Planning Alternative Tomorrows with Hope**. It is a facilitated meeting where the person at the centre, in this case Jillian, was given full permission to dream of her future and what she would like it to look like. The facilitators assist her to expand on her ideas through various methods, in questioning. Invited guests are encouraged to consider Jillian's future plan and expand on various points and take ownership for various pieces of Jillian's future plan. All the discussions are captured in a beautiful graphic poster created in front of the participants' eyes.



Jillian and Some of her Support Circle Members Share their Perspective

Jillian's thoughts about her PATH: "In June I had a meeting called PATH. In the meeting I had some of my family and friends there. In the meeting we talked about the idea, what my future and dreams are. I felt very happy that everyone was there to help me plan my future and talk about what they think my dreams are. There were a lot of surprises. One of the surprises was how many dreams I have! I have a lot of dreams and a lot of dreams for my future. My friends and family are very supportive of me.

Jillian's mom shares: "Jillian is a very shy young lady who has always kept her dreams to herself or shared them only with her mother. Then came her PATH meeting. Suddenly the shyness was gone, and Jillian shared her hopes, dreams and aspirations with the group. It was a very heart-warming experience to be a part of it all. Being in the group for PATH with those closest to Jillian validated her dreams and brought them to the forefront of everyone's minds, including her own. With the support of the members there, and the hard work of the wonderful facilitators there, Jillian is now fortified with the strength that came from the meeting, and having said out loud what she really dreams of has made everything more real to her, as well as to others. In a song from Disney's Cinderella movie, a line reads, 'a dream is a wish your heart makes....when you're fast asleep.' But for Jillian, 'a dream is a wish her heart makes, when she's wide awake.'"

Jillian's friend and PATH participant Gessi shares: "Over the last year I have had the pleasure of getting to know Jillian. Jillian slowly began to open up as our friendship has grown. PATH allowed me the opportunity to learn and understand what Jillian's goals and aspirations are in life. This quiet young lady was able to open up by showing us through pictures and key words what her dreams are.

Since PATH, Jillian has begun her journey towards making her dreams a reality. She has travelled to Montreal, Quebec with me by train. There, she saw sights, experienced French Canadian culture and language, she made friends with my 17 year old sister, went to the farmer's market and made handmade pasta with her new "Nonna" (my grand-mother), attended an Italian/Portuguese wedding where she danced and had her first alcoholic beverage. It was wonderful to be a part of these new experiences especially because they were all part of her PATH. It was an absolute honour to be part of such a special event for Jillian. As much as Jillian is an outgoing and fun loving young woman, her shyness sometimes makes it challenging for some of us, friends and family, to know what her deepest thoughts, dreams and aspirations are. PATH allowed us to understand Jillian as she begins her journey into adulthood."

Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal Awarded to Lara Wong

Lara Wong being
awarded the Queen
Elizabeth's II
Diamond Jubilee
Medal for significant
achievement and
remarkable service
on June 8, 2012 at
Roy Thompson Hall
by Honourable David Onley.



Rebecca Beayni Receives Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal

Rebecca has recently been recognized (Sept. 2012) for her global work by being awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Diamond Jubilee Medal. She was nominated by the Canadian Association for Community Living and is deeply grateful for the support she has been given to continue her work and for the great honour that has been bestowed upon her. Rebeccabeayni.com continues the work of Rebecca and her circle of support in their journey through the limits of social justice toward a deepening of community capacity for us all.



Changes to Special Services at Home and Passport Funding Programs

The promise of Direct Funding was to support inclusion, for individual's with developmental disabilities to live a life of their choosing, fulfilling their hopes and dreams and meeting their goals and aspirations by being valued members of community. Over the past year the new Developmental Services Ontario (DSO) approach to deliver funding and services has been in effect and with it, further changes and announcements.

As of April 2012, Special Services at Home (SSAH) funding was reintroduced as a children's program only. Respite funding for adults would now flow through Passport. The Ministry advised that all current funding that adults were receiving for respite would be honored. It was noted that no changes to funding would occur; however, families concern remains. What happens when my son or daughter goes through the DSO's Supports Intensity Scale assessment? There is yet another gap, young adults who turn 18 after March 31st 2013, will no longer receive Special Services at Home funding. Going forward people from 18-21 will not receive any funding for respite if they remain in school as eligibility for Passport funding is for those who have completed their high school or no longer enrolled in secondary school. People are quickly becoming wary of transformation in Ontario.

Further regulations to the Passport program are being made and adjusted. In the fall of 2012 the Ministry of Community and Social Services announced that there would be changes to how funding is spent as well as accountability and reporting processes for how resources are being managed. The MCSS was accepting feedback on proposed changes until November 5, 2012th. The Individualized Funding Coalition for Ontario (IFCO) was one of many groups that submitted feedback for the MCSS's consideration.

The IFCO is a coalition comprised of people with disabilities, families, advocates, facilitators, organizations and agencies that have been "working together to make individualized funding a reality in Ontario." Becoming involved with like minded people who rally together and support one another for better lives for those we love helps individuals, families and friends continue to believe in what is possible and then make it happen.

Selena Blake

(Extend-A-Family's I.F.C.O. Representative)

``Believe in yourself! Have faith in your abilities! Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy.``

Norman Vincent Peale

Thank You

Appreciation and Acknowledgements

- Extend-A-Family would like to acknowledge the following schools for their partnership and support in building friendships and creating awareness about inclusion in their respective schools and communities: Cummer Valley M.S., Our Lady of Perpetual Help C.S., Transfiguration of Our Lord C.S., St. Jude C.S., Stella Maris C.S., St. Clare C.S., St. Henry C.S., St. Timothy C.S., St. Luke C.S., King George P.S., Holy Angels C.S., St. Cecilia, C.S., Hollycrest P.S., Kingsview J.S., R.H. McGregor P.S., Berner Trail P.S., Eastview P.S., Forest Manor P.S., Glen Hunter P.S., John Diefenbaker P.S., Maurice Cody J.P.S., Muirhead P.S., Newtonbrook S.S., Portage Trail J.C.S., Regent Heights P.S., Queen Victoria P.S., Pleasant P.S.
- Linda Feldy, a teacher from Stella Maris Catholic School, for her effortless dedication, care, and support in making the lives of each student as fulfilling and rich with endless possibilities.
- St. Clements Church for their gracious support in housing the Extend-A-Family Winter Gathering.
- St. Leonard's Church for their continued support in providing Extend-A-Family with a great space for our Annual General Meeting and other celebratory activities.
- St. Simon-the-Apostle for housing Kathie Snow's Disability is Natural seminar and Safe and Secure Future Networks.
- OWN Co-op Housing for their continued support in providing a great space for Extend-A-Family's summer student program and Safe & Secure Future Network workshops each year.
- Extend-A-Family would like to acknowledge Corvette Public School for welcoming our evening parent group.
- Extend-A-Family would like to acknowledge St. John's Ambulance for your open minded approach and welcoming this summer while one of our youth receiving training and certification in CPR!
- Continued thanks to Fairlawn Neighbourhood Community Centre and your creativity and welcoming spirit in supporting youth to participate as volunteers.
- Extend-A-Family would like to thank Daily Bread Food Bank & North York Harvest Food Bank in supporting, and welcoming youth volunteers at their facilities and community gardens.
- Thank you to the Etobicoke Humane Society for their commitment and welcoming all animal lovers.

Thank you for your financial 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, Ontario
M4N 2L6

For receipt purposes, we require the following information:

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Telephone: _____

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