

EVERYBODY BELONGS



My Friend Daniel by Ari

I've volunteered in various ways since I was a teenager. I started out with the mandatory hours an Ontario student must complete in high school and developed into something where I wanted to make a "difference." Upon graduating university, I embarked to Israel and volunteered every day with children; it was one of the richest experiences I've had the privilege of partaking in.

Returning from Israel and facing the sobering reality that I would now need to find a job, volunteering took a back seat for a few years. Fast forward to age 28, things had calmed down, I had a house (oh the joys of home ownership!), a fiancée, (world's best woman), and suddenly some free time that I didn't know what to do with. At this point, I figured it was as good a time as any to put a toe back into the waters of the volunteer world. I volunteered at a soup kitchen for 2 years. As much as I enjoyed the experience, and I really did, I still felt that I wanted to make more of an impact on something or someone. It sounded like a lofty goal, and the snippets that I was reading about various organizations didn't really resonate with me until I came across Extend-A-Family; an organization that focused on improving the lives of children with a developmental disability. This resonated with me immediately. My older sister has been in this field in a professional capacity and her work never ceased to inspire me. I met with the fantastic Coordinators as part of the screening process and that's when they first told me about Daniel. Daniel is 19 years old, loves basketball, history, and Jordan sneakers. Seemed like the perfect fit, to be perfectly honest.

I was nervous before the first time I met him and his mother. I had no idea what to expect. Although nerves and a healthy amount of uncertainty were present on both sides, the meeting went well. I remember thinking that he seemed like a great young man, although a bit shy and timid.

By our third meeting, whatever shyness initially existed had been wiped out completely and the conversations have not stopped flowing ever since. Almost every Thursday, I'll pick Daniel up from his afterschool program and we will go play some basketball. Not only is his attire far more fashionably appropriate than mine for the basketball court, his skills have improved dramatically! He usually can't wait to show me one of the things I taught him, that he has perfected over the last week. After a good sweat (more me than him as I'm just trying to keep up), we will usually grab a slice of pizza (no better reward for some cardio than an old-fashioned slice) and I'll bring him back to his mom's. With the weather turning colder, Daniel has graciously agreed to let me teach him how to play hockey this winter. If our basketball sessions are any indication, Daniel will likely be skating circles around me come February. We've also been getting his resume in order in the hope that he will be able to find a part-time job over the coming months. (Foot Locker is a front-runner and natural fit given his love of Jordan sneakers.) Any employer would be blessed to have Daniel to work with and my guess is that it won't take him much time to find a good part-time gig that he enjoys. I suggested the NBA, but he boldly proclaimed (with an ear-to-ear smile) that he's not quite good enough...just yet.

My time with Daniel, without a doubt, is always a highlight of my week. He's precocious in the best of ways, full of hope, optimism, energy, and light... Daniel is a constant reminder to me that the world is a beautiful place, and to not be scared of trying new things. Sounds easy on the periphery, and yet every week I think long and hard before undertaking any new challenge, be it small or large, easy or difficult. He is literally up for any challenge without any convincing and I love that quality – he is fearless. I look forward to many, many more Thursdays with Daniel and watching him (and vicariously myself) grow and develop as time goes on.

Extend-A-Family

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Message from the Executive Director, *Ruth Fernandes*

Not long ago, I had the opportunity to visit Newfoundland, the eastern part of our country, for the first time. I was told that people from Newfoundland were some of the most friendly, welcoming people in Canada. It is true! Not only did the people in St. John's willingly help me find my way around, with a smile, but also proudly shared about their beautiful city. I was warmly invited to peoples' homes; people I met for the first time. A local resident spontaneously joined me for lunch one afternoon during my travels. I came away reminded about the joys of a welcoming community.

Often community is right at our doorstep but we may not see it because we may be looking too far. Sometimes we let the fear of rejection come in the way of creating a relationship. Making for a welcoming neighborhood, classroom or work place is a shared responsibility of each one of us; we cannot wait for the other person to make the difference.

With community at the core of our work, we have had the benefit of creating a strategic plan for our organization and are excited to carry it forward over the next few years.

As the New Year is upon us, I would like to wish each one of you a warm and joy-filled year celebrating community!

Message from the Chair of the Board of Directors, *Jeff Short*

Who is Extend-A-Family? What are we doing well, and why is our role important for our families, friends, and our communities? What can we improve on? In what ways can Extend-A-Family play a stronger role in our communities? And what challenges might we face as an organization over the next few years? These are some of the questions that we have been working through over the past several months as we have been developing a new strategic plan for Extend-A-Family.

It is important to occasionally take a step back from the work we do as an organization to reflect on what we do and why we do it. The strategic plan offers us this opportunity. It has also allowed Board members to work more closely with the staff and families, and to learn more about each other.

Although much has changed over the years, building relationships and community remain at the centre of Extend-A-Family's work.

Thank you to Susan Tremblay from Management Advisory Services for sharing her valuable expertise and guidance during the development of the strategic plan, and to the Board, staff, and families for the critical input they have been providing!

Call for Submissions

If you would like to submit an article to an upcoming Extend-A-Family newsletter and website, please send it to your Coordinator or to the office, indicating such. All submissions must have a signed release form from the author and any photographs must have a release form, with permission from all persons appearing in the photo. All submissions are subject to the discretion of Extend-A-Family. We cannot guarantee that your contribution will be used, but given all that, we would love to hear from you.

Who Is Extend-A-Family

Extend-A-Family is a not-for-profit, charitable organization that works in the community to facilitate the building of relationships between individuals who have disabilities and other members of the community. We believe that all people belong and that our community is stronger when all members are included. We foster public awareness of the gifts and contributions of people with disabilities.

Annual General Meeting

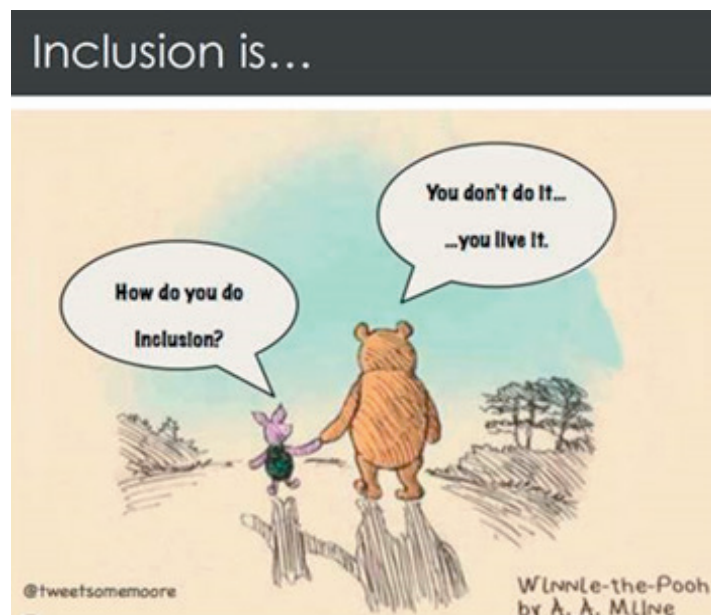
Extend-A-Family's Annual General Meeting is a great social opportunity to get together to support the work of Extend-A-Family and the Board of Directors by helping to maintain charitable status and to have some good, old-fashioned fun.

It is a great way to support each other in the journey with your loved ones, to feel a sense of belonging and celebrate together.

Please come out and support Extend-A-Family's journey and vision that "Everybody Belongs!" in June 2018. Details to be announced.

“We’ve each been invited to this present moment by design. Our lives are joined together like the tiles of a mosaic; none of us contributes the whole of the picture, but each of us is necessary for it’s completion.”

Karen Casey & Martha Vanceberg (1996)



Resource Links

www.familiesforasecurefuture.ca
www.planningnetwork.ca/en-ca
www.extendafamily.ca

A Mom's Perspective by Mary

My daughter Irene is currently attending her neighbourhood high school, in grade 10, in regular academic classes. Our goal for her is to experience full inclusion, academically and socially, and to be a valued and contributing member of her school community in her neighbourhood.

Irene loves going to school, and has enjoyed many great experiences. Most importantly, she has made some great friends, and due to her presence as of grade nine, a couple of very enthusiastic students created a Buddy Club, with the intention to hang out with Irene at lunch. This year, the Buddy Club officially became the Unity Club, which is a club that focuses on creating friendships, uniting students at the school, and taking care of mental health. Irene is also involved in two other clubs (Just Fit and Greek Club), and she participates in her most passionate pastime: dance. Dance is the highlight of high school for Irene, and being able to find subjects of interest is key to her happiness. She even got to perform on stage on "Dance Night." She was thrilled about that. It was great to see her so happy. She is very fortunate that there are wonderful students and some caring teachers.

Not only has inclusion been great socially, but Irene is also benefitting academically. Teachers are using "differentiated instruction" and "universal design" to make inclusion possible. She is learning alongside her peers and is enjoying the challenge. Her favourite subjects this year, besides Dance, are Science, English and Civics.

With "belonging" amazing things happen!!!

“*If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.*”

African Proverb

A Dad's Perspective by Geoff

I have been involved in Extend-A-Family since its inception in the early 1970s, and served as Board Chair for Extend-A-Family North York for many years.

The news that our son, then aged 4, would never be able to talk, but just make sounds, was devastating. As new immigrants to Canada, we had no family to fall back on, and my wife and I just had to get on with it. Or so we thought! Our paediatrician sent us to see a Child Psychologist at Toronto Hospital for Sick Children for an assessment. The doctor gave our non-verbal child a test requiring verbal answers. Her conclusion was that, sorry, but he will not progress beyond the sounds that he makes now.

We found a speech therapist that agreed to work with him even though the doctor in charge gave us the same prognosis as the Psychologist. We were told "what you see is what you get." The speech therapist did not give up though, she found a school that might be able to help; it was not near where we lived, but it was a start. That school worked with our son for 10 years!

The conclusion that we drew is that when dealing with the medical and other professionals, if your problem does not fit within their field, they don't know any more than you do. You must dig for answers/help anywhere you can. YOU are the expert of your child!

Where can you go for help? Look around you, there are many organizations around. There are many parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, who face, or have faced, similar problems. Talk to them; try to understand what they did, because understanding what did and did not work for them, may help you. You must try many paths before the right one opens.

Our son, now 50+, has lived on his own independently for many years. He has a part-time job and manages his own affairs. He belongs to his community. And, yes, the experts were wrong, our son speaks a lot.

Beyond “Difficult Behaviours” Supporting Confidence, Competence and Well-Being

A workshop presented by David Pitonyak

In February 2017, Extend-A-Family and Families for a Secure Future partnered to bring David Pitonyak to present to our families. David spoke to our families on the topic of *Beyond “Difficult Behaviours” - Supporting Confidence, Competence and Wellbeing.*

David speaks with compassion and humour and related to the audience through story telling. Our attendees walked away with a greater understanding of the impact of anxiety on their loved ones and how that anxiety impacts their behaviours. Many times, the person who experiences anxiety uses behaviour as a strategy to cope. We need to rethink how we see behaviour and our reaction to it. As we become more aware of the degree of anxiety a person is experiencing, we should attempt to make the person feel safe and in control. If it results in difficult behaviour, our job is to pause, reflect and consider why behaviour makes sense to this person.

David also challenged us to think about the ways a young person can contribute to their community, asking ourselves are we making memories to help increase confidence?

The workshop was well attended and well received. Thank you, David!

To know more about David Pitonyak and his work of with families, here is a link:

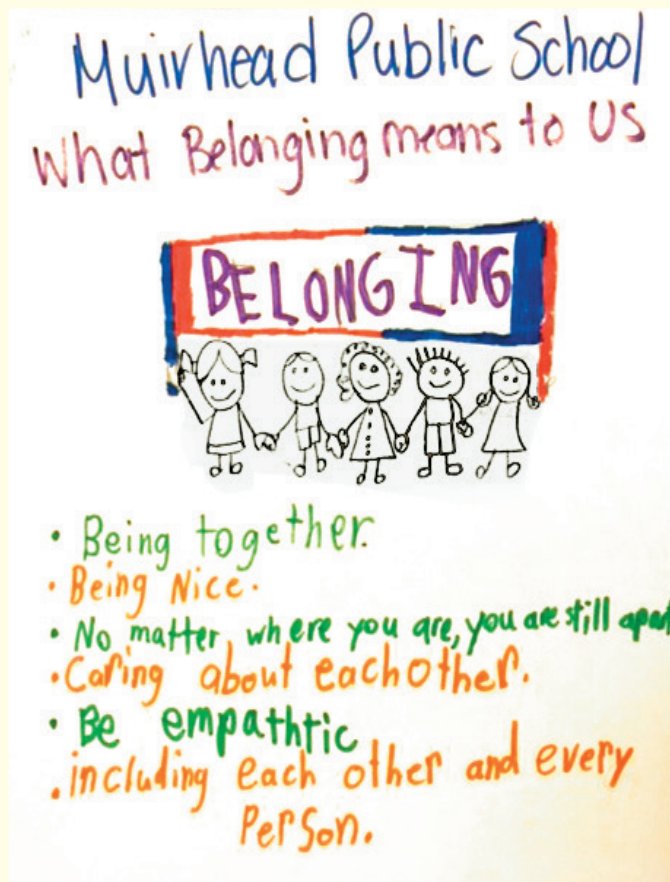
<http://www.dimage.com/>



Check our website for upcoming workshops

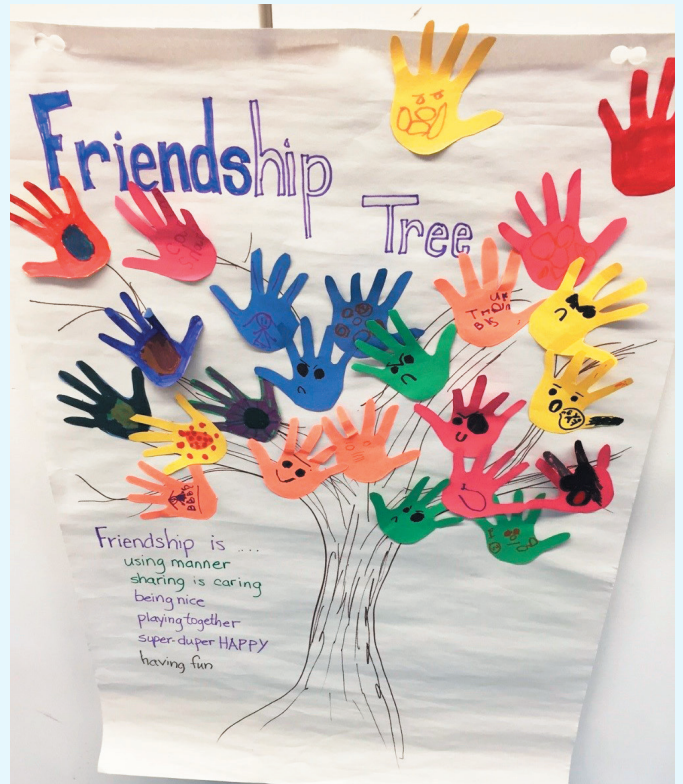
www.extendafamily.ca/news-events/conferences-workshops/

Friendship Circle MUIRHEAD



Friendship Circle HIGHCASTLE

The friendship circle at Highcastle Public School thinks manners are important to be a good friend and a good person. Friends are caring, nice and fun! Friends are great to play with and just to be together! A good friend will be there for you, no matter what mood or what kind of day you're having. Best of all, when you are with your friends, you will feel super-duper happy!



Friendship Circle CORVETTE

The kids in the friendship circle at Corvette Junior Public School read the book "The Invisible Boy" and later they thought about friendship and shared these ideas:

Friendship is....

- ✓ "Asking, do you want to be my friend?"
- ✓ "Having fun!"
- ✓ "Sharing"
- ✓ "Playing together"
- ✓ "Standing up for you"
- ✓ "Asking, do you want to play?"
- ✓ "Caring"
- ✓ "Playing soccer together"



Spinclusion at Guides - Group 155 by *Jessica*

Spinclusion (created by Community Living Toronto) is a fun, interactive game that creates a welcoming and inclusive environment for children of all abilities and cultures. It focuses on peoples' abilities, thinking positively about differences and practising ways to consider peoples' feelings.

For the Group 155 Girl Guides, an evening of Spinclusion encouraged sharing and exploring ways to build a more welcoming community for all!

This energetic bunch of girls shared their ideas to celebrate the differences that make us all unique, and find the connectedness in our interests and desire to know more about each other.

Some ideas on making someone new feel welcomed were shared, including:

- Include them in conversations
- Show them around
- Play with them, include them in games
- Notice them, be nice
- Invite them to sit with you for lunch
- Ask them about their life, their interests and family



We are so hopeful that these girls will take these great messages and spread them into their everyday life in school, groups and their community!

Closing thoughts from the group:

“Treat others like you’d like to be treated.”

“Be nice and stand up for one another.”

“Compliment and encourage each other.”

Spinclusion at Hilltop Middle School by *Jumoke*

This year Extend-A-Family partnered with Hilltop Middle School for a great opportunity to learn more about inclusion and the importance of belonging. In the spring, I visited the Grades 6, 7, and 8 classrooms where we engaged in a one hour session playing the game Spinclusion.

The students answered a variety of questions that made them think about how they could be more inclusive amongst their peers in school, in their community and even in their homes.

Both staff and students expressed their appreciation for their new learning. I was amazed at the responses of the students, their willingness to learn and the desire to become ambassadors of change in their school and community.

From the former Principal at Hilltop Middle School:

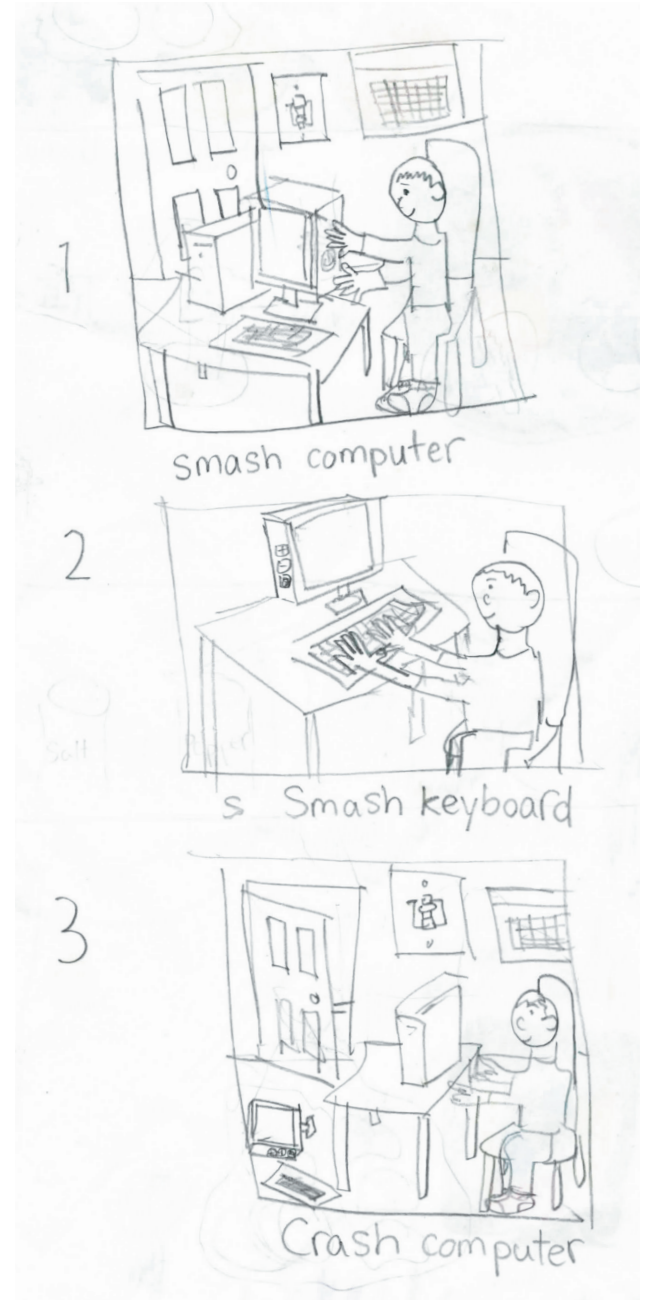
“In 2016-17, Extend-A-Family and Hilltop Middle School developed a partnership to support the entire school by participating in Spinclusion sessions for each class. Students were actively engaged in playing the game that focused on inclusion and acceptance of all abilities. Many staff expressed the great value of these sessions in helping students see through a different lens. We heard students using words of encouragement and support throughout the sessions. Three of our grade 8 students even volunteered to support the Facilitator in working with the younger grades and felt the positive impact they had on their peers. Give it a try!”

Art Corner

by Eddie



by Greg



by Julian



Calling All Artists!

If you would like the opportunity to be showcased in future Newsletters, please send your artwork to your Coordinator.

Manar and Aliya by Aliya

Last year, as my New Year's resolution, I decided to find an organization that resonated with me and tried to become involved. I wanted to give back and help make a difference. That's when I found Extend-A-Family and my life changed. First, meeting the Extend-A-Family Coordinator was such an incredible experience off the bat! She explained the effortless process and I was moved by what Extend-A-Family was achieving in their efforts. I was so thankful to be considered and welcomed as a host. After meeting Fatiha and Manar, I knew I had made the best (long overdue) decision to become involved with such a wonderful organization. I have made lifelong family friends and we've only just begun our journey together.

Manar has become a part of me and I feel privileged to be a part of her life. We've played many games together, taken lovely walks, seen ballet, done some shopping and even gabbed like girlfriends tend to do! She is dear to my heart and it's a bond I'll cherish for many years to come.

I started this journey to give back and help bring some joy to another life. To my great surprise, it was the other way around. Manar has brought me a lot of happiness and I recommend this opportunity to everyone I know. It is a wonderful way to get involved, make a difference and I'm forever grateful to be a part of it!



Planning for a Good Life with LifeCourse

In November 2017, Extend-A-Family partnered with IAI (Integration Action for Inclusion) to host two workshops. Jane St John, a family leader from the University of Missouri, Kansas City, shared LifeCourse tools for planning with families. This framework comes with a series of questions to consider and simple tools, we can all use.

We were exposed to three simple graphics that will assist us in sharing our vision with agencies, schools and others. This simple trajectory can show families if they are making choices that are moving them away from their vision. The Integrated STAR – supported decision-making tool is an excellent way to identify a variety of supports that can assist to accomplish an event or support you through a life event or major transition. The one page profile is a great way to bring your loved one to life! The profile helps to identify their strengths, what people admire about them, and helps us consider what good supports look like. Together these tools will assist families in their journey.

Some comments from parents and professionals were:

"Ask a different question, have a different conversation!"

"All families would benefit from learning to use LifeCourse tools."

"I am learning; I should create a plan and look at the big picture!"

"We are encouraged to think outside support services."

"Plan life not services."

"Make life colourful."

"Families need to know the importance of visioning for future planning."

Check it out at www.lifecoursetools.com

Anjali and Liane by *Liane*

I have been a host at Extend-A-Family for just over a year now and I absolutely love it. This is not just a volunteer opportunity; it is so much more. It is to create a special bond/ friendship with a child or youth. Anjali and I created that special bond within the first two visits. We both have the same interests, hobbies and live within the same community. This has helped us create a meaningful bond between us. I see Anjali about one to two times a month and we spend the afternoon together. We do everything from playing board games, to making crafts for family and friends, to baking and going for walks within the community. Now that I have had the chance to get to know Anjali and her family, I am going to start connecting her more to the community. I am hoping that we will go to the mall, movies, bowling and so much more. I am going to continue to be a host with Anjali as long as I can because this is a genuine friendship and with any friendships you don't want to lose them.

Check our website for Host opportunities www.extendafamily.ca/opportunities/volunteer-opportunities

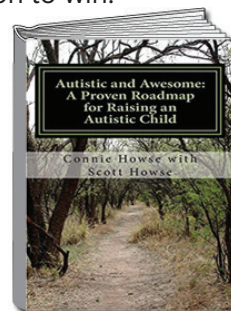
Book Reviews

Autistic and Awesome by *Kay*

Autistic and Awesome: A Proven Roadmap for Raising an Autistic Child written by Connie and Scott Howse. Connie is a musician and psychologist and an advocate for people with autism. Scott is her oldest son, diagnosed with autism at the age of two and a half. He has many accomplishments including writing, being a pianist and athlete as a long-distance runner. Both took part in a PBS documentary *A Wider World*. My husband and I met Connie and Scott and two of his brothers on a cruise this October. There was an instant connection in many areas of our lives. Scott talked to us and every time he saw us, he shook my hand and said "Hello, Kay. How are you?" and we talked a little. He took part in all the games with enjoyment and a determination to win.

During our conversations, Connie told us about this book she and Scott had written. And, while our son does not have autism, this book parallels many of the experiences we, as families, go through together – searching, needing answers, and the frustration of working with medical and educational "experts." It is important to celebrate the achievements and joys of all our family members. I found that Scott's writing in this book, his poems and his stories reminded me of these important values.

Thank you, Scott and Connie, for the gift of your writing and the gift of getting to know you, Shawn and Franklin.



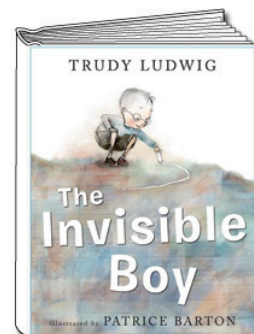
The Invisible Boy

Author *Trudy Ludwig*

This children's book is about Brian, a boy who felt like he was invisible. As the story evolves, the reader begins to understand Brian is left out of everything or ignored by everyone, even his teacher. Brian begins to become visible with the arrival of a new student who discovers Brian is a pretty interesting guy. We can all see Brian by the end of this lovely story as Brian is being included within his class and at recess.

The children in the friendship circle at Corvette Junior Public School read this book and shared their thoughts. Most of the kids liked the book and thought it would be good for others to read. One girl felt it was very sad in the beginning, and even though it has a happy ending, she would not recommend it. One person thought it was a good book to read with other kids because we learned that it is not nice to feel invisible. We learned that Brian was no longer invisible when the kids invited him to be in their groups and to sit with them at lunch.

This is a great book to talk about being welcoming and inclusive at school and in play. This was a good book to read with children in grades 2 and 3. There is a discussion guide in the book as well.



Rida and Tania by *Tania*

My name is Tania and I am a host with Extend-A-Family. I came to know about this organization during the middle of 2017, and although I have only been a host for a few months now, I am pleased to be part of Extend-A-Family and especially be a part of Rida's life! I look forward to continuing to build a relationship with my host family throughout the New Year.

I have learned a lot from Rida even though we have known each other for only a few months. I am pleased to see how strong her family support system is, especially how her siblings make sure she is included not only at school but with their circle of friends as well.



Nawin Mutti

Nawin is an alumni member of Extend-A-Family. He has presented to several of our support groups and shared his journey into the workforce with our families. Nawin is a graduate of the Hospitality Management program at Humber College. He is a shining example of what is possible if we follow our dreams. Nawin is passionate about spreading his philosophy to others. He believes we are here to enhance others' lives.

Quotes and inspirational comments by parents and their children:

"I came away from Nawin's presentation with a sense that, here is a young man with a strength of character and humanity that was truly inspirational to me. He has faced adversity on more fronts that most of us have not faced and still comes out on top!"

"Nawin had to face severe obstacles in his life, especially as a child. Thinking about the challenges he went through exhausted me. But as we saw and heard this young man in his presentation yesterday, I observed a smile from ear to ear, HOPE, and even self-pride...a man who wants to be heard, a man who wants to help others, a man who totally touched our hearts!"

"Very inspiring and motivating."

"Great maturity at such a young age."

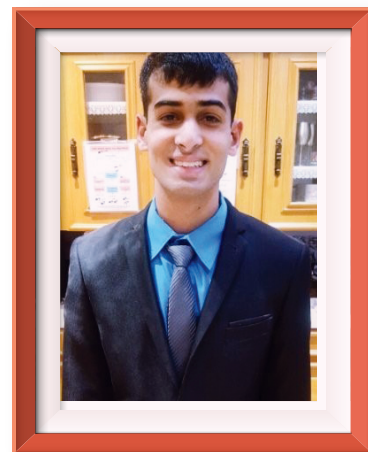
"Well-spoken and great work to inspire others."

"Whole presentation was inspirational."

"He is brilliant. Self-motivating, a good motivator for anyone in their 20's, disability or not."

"A lived example of what life can be like for people with disabilities, what people with disabilities can bring to the world!"

"Delivery was impactful. Feeling inspired."



Safe & Secure Futures Network

The Safe and Secure Futures Network brings together parents and caregivers whose sons, daughters, and family members are adults or approaching adulthood.

In addition to building and sustaining relational networks, and making plans to secure the future, families also benefit from the opportunity to come together for mutual support and learning.

The networks meet once month and explore themes around creating a good life, with real friends, real work, real home, real opportunities and creating support circles around us. When things get challenging the networks offer a safe and supportive space to lean on each other.

Nusrat Motala is the Facilitator for the East group, ssfne@extendafamily.ca

Jessica Van Wyk is the Facilitator for the West group, ssfnw@extendafamily.ca

Sibling Support Groups by *Jessica*

Extend-A-Family facilitates a variety of support groups, including two support groups dedicated to siblings. Why siblings? If we think about it, our brothers and sisters will be our longest lasting relationships within our lives. These relationships, like any others, take understanding, energy and love to maintain and grow. Being a sibling of a brother or sister with a disability holds additional responsibilities, future planning, celebrating, and a whole lot of conversations. The Sibling Support Groups are places to come together with others who “get it” ... who share similar family experiences, giving members a safe space to find allies, support, share information, celebrate our brothers and sisters and make new friends. The Sibling Support Group is a place to connect and have valuable conversations, sharing fears and dreams about the future, sharing stories of the way our brothers and sisters have shaped us throughout our lives (and continue to do so), and so much more. Within the group, strangers have turned into friends, tears turn into hope, and there’s been smiles and laughter as we celebrate each other, and our brothers and sisters. The Sibling Support Group has been a place where after a heart-filled story someone says “I hear you”, “I’ve been there”, “I understand” ... and you know they actually do. Beautiful.

The future is full of the unknown and the questions of how to walk alongside our brothers and sisters to live a “good life” will always be there. It’s great to know there is a safe place to land at the end of the day, at least once a month, at the Sibling Support Group.

With open arms, we welcome you.

Extend-A-Family hosts an Adult Sibling Support Group for siblings age 18 years and over.

This year Extend-A-Family has created a new Youth Sibling Support Group for siblings ages 14 to 17.

For more information about Extend-A-Family’s Sibling Support Groups please visit our website or contact

Jessica at jvw@extendafamily.ca

Summer Institute by *Nusrat*

Over the course of the summer, I had the opportunity to attend the Toronto Summer Institute, hosted by Inclusion Press, where I attended John McKnight’s module on building community. John McKnight’s passion for community building is expressed through his dialogues, story telling and metaphors. Throughout the module, I reflected on how Extend-A-Family’s work honours the young people we support. Being present and participating in the community through clubs, volunteering and employment will allow others to see the strengths, passion and skills that are contributed. A community can be built anywhere with care and hospitality. Get your family involved with your neighbourhood schools, community parks, local community centres, and coffee shops – spaces where people are gathered for a common interest.

I would like to share a metaphor of John McKnight’s, which really resonated with me, “Think of our community as baking a cake, each ingredient contributes to the cake, if an ingredient is missing our cake may not be rich and full of flavour. To build a rich and full community, everybody contributes by sharing their gifts. Building a community is about being together, being in places which ignore deficits and honours capacities, and then only can we begin to see the possibilities.”



Summer Student Experience by *Julian and Helena*



"I loved going rock climbing."

"I made it to the top!"

"I loved canoeing across the water with the ducks, swans and geese."

This past summer, I had the great pleasure to spend a week with Julian. We had a blast exploring community and trying new things together. Our adventures led us to meeting some great people that helped us face those small fears that naturally come when trying new things. Although sharing these memories of our adventures is truly unforgettable, I would say our greatest adventure of all was putting these memories into a movie. I enjoyed the opportunity to work with a young man as creative as Julian.

Fundraising in the Summer by *Aida and Piali*

My mom and I had the idea for a Ronald McDonald House Toronto fundraiser to raise money for sick children!

Piali and I gave away straws decorated with 'Thank you' messages and smiley-face stickers in return for donations. We created a beautiful poster for our fundraiser with sparkly red-letter stickers, rainbow borders, and other fun stickers. The day before the fundraiser, Piali and I distributed flyers for the fundraiser and for movie night. I had a great time handing out flyers in my neighborhood and meeting my neighbors!

At the fundraiser, on Tuesday July 11th, Piali and I set up our poster, the balloons, stickers, straws and flyers at the McDonald's on Eglinton.

A whole bunch of people came at once around lunchtime! It was great to raise money for Ronald McDonald House. This has been an amazing experience!



Volunteering on My Own by *Rebecca*



I volunteered at Galloway clothing bank for the past summer on my own. I usually got the clothes from a bin or big donation bags. I hung up all kinds of clothing - shirts, sweaters, coats, pants and dresses. I hung the clothes on two racks and sorted them by size, gender and age. When I found any loose hangers, I would give them to Debbie and save them for future use. I would ask her for help if I didn't know where to put the clothing.

I also volunteered on my own at Malvern Family Resource Centre. I did landscaping there. I used a shovel and a weed fork to dig the weeds around trees and stones and I used a pair of gloves to protect my hands too. I put the weeds into the garbage bags that were provided by the centre and I also sat on one so I would not get dirty and no plants would poke me.

I felt happy and confident when I volunteered on my own and I got to ride on the bus to and from home, which I enjoyed very much, too.

Awards and Acknowledgements

Award of Inclusion

The Extend-A-Family Award of Inclusion is an annual award recognizing the outstanding work that schools and community organizations contribute to inclusion, friendship building and partnership. Congratulations to the recipient of the 2016~2017 Award of Inclusion: **Muirhead Public School**.



Acknowledgement and Appreciation

Extend-A-Family would like to give a special thank you to Susan Tremblay who has facilitated a very successful Strategic Plan. She came to Extend-A-Family through Management Advisory Services.

Extend-A-Family is very appreciative to all the schools and community centres that kindly provide space with an opportunity to build new skills, foster friendship and support inclusive school communities. They include: Berner Trail Junior Public School, Corvette Junior Public School, Fern Junior and Senior Public School, Highcastle Public School, Joyce Public School, Macklin Public School, Muirhead Public School, Leslieville Junior Public School, Pauline Junior Public School, St. Anselm Catholic School, St. John the Evangelist Catholic School, Wellesworth Junior School, Zion Heights Junior High School, Children's Peace Theatre, Critter's Castle Pet Shop, Cummer Lodge, Dovercourt Boys and Girls Club, Councillor Glen De Baeremaeker (Scarborough Centre), Fervent Events Inc, Joseph J. Piccininni Community Recreation Centre, PC Cooking School East Mall, MFRC (Malvern Family Resource Centre), North York Harvest Food Bank, Runnymede Community Church, Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities, Scarborough Museum, Smithfield Community Centre, Wallace Emerson Community Centre.

Winter Gathering

On a sunny Sunday afternoon in February 2017, Extend-A-Family hosted an annual Winter Gathering where we came together to celebrate friendship, network, eat and have fun. Staff and volunteers were prepared for the 102-people expected; 80 attended and joined in the fun.

The icebreaker of People Bingo had guests work the room, finding others who match the activities, such as: who likes the colour orange, is a twin, is wearing a pink sock. Six people completed their cards: Alexander, Jessica, Clayton, Colm, Filomena and Rita. They enjoyed the networking!

Pizza and salad were offered and people brought the most delicious desserts and snacks to share. Then, the talents of the DJs, the graceful dancer, hilarious comedians, beautiful singer, and marvellous keyboard player dazzled us all. As if there wasn't enough fun, there was also the craft table.

A special thank-you to the volunteers for all your hard work and to the City of Toronto for providing the space for the party.

If you have any suggestions for our next party, please connect with Cate at the office,

416-484-1317 or cd@extendafamily.ca

Key messages from the Housing Forum, June, 27 2017

When Families Take Charge of Housing... *from* - Durham Association for Family Respite Services www.dafrs.com

We understand the following:

1. That **Housing, Home and Support** are different things and best contemplated and achieved separately, coming together in a timely fashion. We must need housing to be addressed in the same ways that **housing** is addressed for the rest of the population, for support to be planfully provided through MCSS to enhance natural **supports**, and for home to be developed through family and friends.
2. That the idea of housing and home is a **lifelong process** of tweaks, edits, stages and next steps. Just like everyone else, the kinds of home and housing that people design and choose are defined by, neighbourhood choices, ferences, affordability, available options, arrangements that work, family, possibility and creativity.
3. That most housing challenges for people with disabilities **are affordability challenges - not disability challenges**. If ople with disabilities were not living mostly in poverty and unable to afford even a basic rent, then their families would also not have to juggle creatively to try to figure out housing first for themselves and then for their adult family member.
4. That people with disabilities **contribute to their neighbourhoods and communities**. Families understand that people with disabilities are not a burden, but contributing full members of the human family. It is together that we find the gifts of one another and build rich, diverse, tolerant and resilient community.
5. That helping families and people with disabilities get good, typical home, housing and supports **does not mean taking away their control and authority and autonomy**. It does mean designing financial and direct supports in ways that augment and support natural family assets.
 - a. such as **portable rent subsidies** so that people can move as circumstances allow them new opportunities
 - b. such as **flexible direct support dollars** and assistance for families to use it well
6. That providing **renovation dollars** allows families to be creative with their home and space today in ways that will house other citizens in self-contained apartments in the future. Access to renovation dollars so that family home or individual home renovations stabilize home for the person today, and perhaps allow a revenue stream in the future when parents are no longer there.
7. That just like for anyone else, housing and home for a person with a disability can **only be designed uniquely for the person** with the help of family, friends and allies one person at a time - no cookie cutter prepared answers. Individually we can be responsive to many different scenarios.
8. That uniquely designed and individualized housing options and a home of one's own **are for everyone**, and that people with complex support requirements thrive equally well, if not better than, their peers in such places of home. This means that individualized housing and home are not just options reserved for the "most capable" of people or or those deemed to have a greater set of life skills, resulting in grouped residential services those who require more support. Real home with individualized features, control, and voice is for everyone.
9. That governments, funders and planners need to **stop building and funding old style, high profile congregated mega projects** (for people with disabilities alone or in combination with seniors, those with mental health problems or other homeless people) NOW. These confuse families, tell them their family members cannot take advantage of what is familiar and typical to us all in housing, and make them pull away from using their own creativity, assets, opportunities, and relationships as the core of home and housing. Don't do this for day supports, don't do this for recreation, don't do this for grouped respite and don't do this for housing. Commit to ONLY vibrant, diverse typical housing and neighbourhoods from this day forward.
10. That where there are keen, hardworking, creative and energetic families who want to build this good life in our community together with their family members, there ought to be **supports and resources to such families**. We know that not every person has such a family or allies, but where they exist and are able to provide innovative, fiscally responsible, and good lives, they should be helped to do so.

Farewell

We would like to acknowledge Selena Blake's years of service as a former Coordinator at Extend-A-Family and Facilitator for the Safe and Secure Futures Network. Selena's contributions and dedication to the core values of Extend-A-Family and finding unique ways to support young people, one person at a time, will serve as a benchmark for our organization. Selena, we wish you continued success in your new role at Durham Association for Family Respite Services.

Best Wishes

Best Wishes to Kristen Carhart, may your year of parental leave be filled with laughter, love and lots of snuggles! Congratulations to you and your family on your new baby girl!

Welcome

Welcome Tricia

Hi, my name is Tricia and I recently became a Board Member with Extend-A-Family. I reached out to Extend-A-Family in the winter of 2016 when my son was experiencing challenges transitioning into Grade 9. I started going to the West Parent Support Group meetings and have felt welcomed and supported from the very beginning. So, joining the Board was an easy decision for me to make!

A little more about me - I grew up on a farm in South-western Ontario and am 1 of 7 children. My parents are both Dutch and came to Canada in the 1950's. We are a tightly knit family. I moved to Toronto for post secondary school and currently live in the west end. I enjoy running, biking, reading, and family and friends and my grouchy old cat, Peanut. I look forward to the upcoming year and the opportunity of becoming more involved with Extend-A-Family's Board.

Welcome Nusrat

My name is Nusrat Motala and I am a new Coordinator with Extend-A-Family. I have been working in the developmental services field for 11 years. I come with a variety of experiences through the many organizations I have worked for and people that I have met throughout my journey. One of my first jobs in the field was with Extend-A-Family as a Summer Student. Through this program I was able to meet people who made me realize the value of their gifts and the importance for it to be shared within their community. My summer experiences contributed towards my career path. And here I am today feeling grateful to be working with incredible, courageous families who continue to be an inspiration by building a rich and meaningful life for their loved ones. I am excited to walk along this journey with my families, community members and colleagues.

Welcome Dinesan

My name is Dinesan Varendran and I am proud to be a new Coordinator with Extend-A-Family. I have an educational background in Psychology and Social Work and over 7 years of experience working in the Social Service Work field. I am avid about promoting change and advocating for marginalized individuals. Before working with Extend-A-Family, I worked with Toronto Distress Centres, working with individuals who experience distress and who require crisis intervention. I believe my empathetic and rapport building skills will be great assets to Extend-A-Family and will allow the families I work with to be more open and comfortable. As a new Coordinator, I hope to apply my knowledge and skills to advocate for families in need and to promote social inclusion.

Thank you for your contributions!

Charitable Registration Number 11890-4846-RR0001

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



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

For Charitable Receipt purposes, we require the following information:

Name: _____ Phone: _____

Mailing Address: _____