

RELATIONSHIPS ARE THE HEART OF THE MATTER

Relationships are, indeed, the heart of the matter. They are the foundation of all that we are and do. Relationships are integral to helping us become the people we are, and who we are not. They keep us safe, feeling loved and included and part of something bigger than ourselves. A Nigerian saying states that one pebble does not make a floor. And neither can we be without each other. Each of us, our beautiful, differing selves are but one pebble which together we ground community, be it our families, neighbourhoods, classrooms, work, etc. Kublai Khan said it well; "But which is the stone that supports the bridge?" We all do. And if I choose to be a stone helping to support the bridge, I choose to be one painted by Hosanna, Daniel or Jason. Aren't they pretty?

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"Those who set the early expectations for people with disabilities - parents, school administrators, employers and care usually have the best of intentions. Nevertheless, many unwittingly engage in the tyranny of low expectations, seeing deficits, not strengths. Disability, not ability. And people with disabilities pick up those messages. When the world doesn't expect much of you, it's hard to expect much of yourself. It's hard to believe in yourself when others don't."

Carol Glazer, National Organization on Disability

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.

Vision Engaged and inclusive community where everybody belongs.

Mission In partnership with families and community, we foster a life of belonging for children and youth with developmental disabilities, building meaningful relationships and valued roles. We share and promote the value of inclusion and belonging.

Values

- Diverse, caring relationships
- Individual gifts and strengths
- Participation in everyday community life
- Respecting and honouring choice
- Valued member in society

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS



What else might you be looking for in this newsletter? We would love to hear from you. If you would like to submit an article or item to an upcoming Extend-A-Family newsletter or website, please send your submission 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 consent release forms 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.

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD CHAIR - *Jennifer Wilson*

Greetings from the board to our Extend-A-Family community. During this unprecedented time, I am grateful to be part of an organization that works so hard to build up positive relationships in the community.

Relationships founded on connection, trust, and support, are at the heart of Extend-A-Family's work, and they're also at the heart of everything that the world currently needs.

COVID-19 increases social isolation and amplifies the daily challenges of life. It's more important than ever to help foster relationships between individuals and families that positively support everyone's wellbeing.

As Extend-A-Family continues to pivot during COVID-19, offering many sessions, workshops, and meet-ups (recurring and new) virtually, and building out policies

and practices that keep its community safe so that people can continue to build and maintain connections. We are grateful to be able to continue to hold such meaningful space in the hearts of the Extend-A-Family community.

We hope you are all keeping safe, well, and connected during this time.

MESSAGE FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR - *Ruth Fernandes*

Ten months ago, if we were told that we would be facing a global pandemic it would have been hard to believe. Year 2020 has been difficult and an unparalleled year for everyone as COVID-19 has brought new challenges to all of our lives. Among other changes, the physical distancing has required us to learn and adjust to new ways of using technology.

While the pandemic has undoubtedly made for a formidable year, it has also forced us to make changes in our lives, some of which have come with renewed resolve and potential.

The pandemic has given each of us a sense of what isolation, separation and vulnerability feels like. It has reminded us, once again, of the need for interdependence; the value of reaching out to one another and sustaining friendships. We have become more keenly aware during this time that humankind has the same need for togetherness, interdependency and supportive relationships.

In dealing with the change that has come upon us, we know that some values will always hold us in good stead; the value of being kind to

one another, acknowledging what we are thankful for, reaching out to discover each other's gifts and talents, noticing things that are going right. We can continue the work of being the change we want to see. We know that we can make a difference when we each try to be part of someone's success.

I would like to wish each of our families and community members a healthy 2021 as well as courage and resilience to face the New Year with hope and optimism!



HUMAN RIGHTS AND INTERSECTIONALITY

While on the path of helping my own child meet his full potential and become a valued member of our society, I realized that I can do more by helping other parents, caregivers and self-advocates overcome multiple barriers, navigate access to community resources, sources of funding and encourage positive advocacy in the education system and beyond.

Oksana Romanov (expert from The Lawyer's Daily, August 4, 2020.)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The Annual General Meeting was held on Thursday, June 25, 2020 via our online portal. Every year, our Annual General Meeting provides our membership with an update to our financial statement and elects the board for the upcoming year. Guest speakers included: Hannah Shi and Jamie Christakos. Musical entertainment by Brad and Dan Christakos was enjoyed by all! Thank you to all of those that attended and we look forward to having you participate again next year.

SEXUALITY AND HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Due to COVID-19, our Sexuality and Healthy Relationship Workshop was held virtually this year and it was a huge success! The workshop is geared towards children/youth with developmental disabilities from 11 to 15 years of age. It is a five-week series, offered once each week, that is designed to provide parents and their children with practical learning opportunities.

Included in the workshop are discussions about feelings, relationships and sexuality. Families have an opportunity to learn with other families who are interested in supporting their children in this important aspect of learning.

Some of the positive feedback we received:

- “this was hands-down the best workshop that we have attended. Very important information was shared.”
- “the topics that (were covered) will keep my son safe - relationship boundaries, and healthy vs unhealthy secrets.”

Extend A Family will be holding another series of this workshop in the Spring of 2021.

TELLING OUR STORIES - Janet Klees

“To be a person is to have a story to tell.” Isak Dinesen

“Stories are what make us human.” Andrew Hinton

Extend-A-Family believes there is great power in sharing our stories. Our stories can uplift, bring context and allow us to imagine the possibilities, ultimately giving us permission to change course, try new things and hold on tightly to hope. Our stories allow us to celebrate in our journey thus far.

In early March, on a gloriously sunny day, Extend-A-Family staff and family members gathered in a cozy space to learn with and from Janet Klees. Janet is the Executive Director of Durham Family Resources, she is an international speaker, an author and an expert on community building and relationship building within community.

During this day of learning we listened to stories and were given primers on how to prepare ourselves for writing. We were reminded to take stock and consider many elements of the audience, determine the purpose of sharing our story and then take an intentional stance to share a balanced story that will ultimately have an image enhancing narrative. There is space for conflict while sharing it respectfully and an awareness to avoid projecting feelings of charity or pity.

This event was one of the few times in March I had the opportunity to gather elbow to elbow with my colleagues and the Extend-A-Family membership. A short time after our workshop, we were all stunned by the news from the World Health Organization that we were indeed in a Pandemic, to be followed by all the measures to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus. As 2020 comes to a close, and we enter 2021, we hope to see more story sharing here at Extend-A-Family.

Story telling in a thoughtful and intentional manner will remind us of our resilience, our resolve and our courage and creativity that will leverage and lighten us to find the energy to take us to brighter days.

We encourage families to find the time and courage to begin to tell their stories, framing it respectfully and sharing balanced stories of your loved one's journey. We would be honoured to support you in your efforts and are always open to listening deeply to your stories of the heart.

We would like to thank Janet Klees and all the family members who came out to learn the basics of telling your story. We are looking forward to the day when we can sit together, shoulder to shoulder, learning and celebrating again.

*The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen
or even heard, but must be felt with the heart.*

Helen Keller

SUPPORT CIRCLES: TOGETHER IS BETTER WITH JOHN LORD – A 2-PART WEBINAR SERIES

“I’m sure you can all agree that these have been challenging times with the pandemic. ...But you know, the pandemic has shown us some significant social issues as well. Including, the fact that many people are socially isolated. So really, there’s no better time to think about our relationships and how we might build a support circle for ourselves, for our family member and for someone else we love.” – John Lord

It was a huge honour for Extend-A-Family to work in partnership with John Lord, Karen Lord and Tanya Williams to offer Support Circles: Together is Better, in the fall of 2020. A great deal of valuable information was shared based on research and personal experience. To learn more about John and the work he has done, check out his website: <http://www.johnlord.net/>

John shared his family’s experience with creating a support circle for his daughter, Karen, over 20 years ago and the importance that this circle continues to hold today. Karen, along with her facilitator Tanya, shared what the circle looks like and how it has supported Karen to achieve many of her goals one of which is becoming a certified Hatha and Laughter Yoga Instructor.

As John shared, the main purpose of a support circle is to create an intentional, caring community with a vulnerable person and their family. Building such a community offers many benefits, including:

- Providing emotional and practical support to the person and their family,
- Offer a space to develop supportive, caring relationships for and with the person,
- To be a vehicle for problem-solving family and personal issues, including advocacy as needed,
- Supporting community connections for and with the person,
- Developing strategies to achieve personal and professional goals.

Here are the key takeaways from the series:

- 1** Begin building a support network for your loved one as early as possible – this will help with school to post-secondary, school to work, and/or school to community transitions, because you will have people walking that journey with you.
- 2** Belonging is about full inclusion where you are seen, known, welcomed, accepted, connected, cared for, and valued. Support circles create belonging – a very important buffer against social isolation.
- 3** Everyone in the support circle brings themselves, but also brings their own support networks with which you can draw on.
- 4** All circle members develop a companionship with each other, that they can benefit from.
- 5** It’s never too late to start a support circle! Age has no boundaries for having a support circle or natural networks.

SAFE AND SECURE FUTURES NETWORKS

Safe and Secure Futures Networks brings together caregivers whose loved ones are adults or transitioning into adulthood.

As our world has changed since March, the Network has moved their monthly meetings to a virtual platform. Safe and Secure Futures Networks continues to promote the importance of supporting families who have adult children with developmental disabilities. The network has done this by developing and nurturing circles of support, financial planning, addressing challenges of caregiving, promoting self-care, nurturing community inclusion and assisting families to navigate developmental services. As well, we showed the Intelligent Lives film, directed by Dan Habib, followed by a conversation, creating and discussing One Page Profiles all while creating a safe and open space for networking, mutual support and resource sharing.

"INCLUSION IS NOT A STRATEGY TO HELP PEOPLE FIT INTO THE SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES WHICH EXIST IN OUR SOCIETIES; IT IS ABOUT TRANSFORMING THOSE SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES TO MAKE IT BETTER FOR EVERYONE. **INCLUSION IS ABOUT CREATING A BETTER WORLD FOR EVERYONE.**"

-DIANE RICHLER, PAST PRESIDENT, INCLUSION INTERNATIONAL



A painting of different shades of pink waves with a marbled pattern. In the middle there is a white wave. The artist shares relationships are like waves as depicted in this picture. *By Eddie Li*



A photograph of 12 different brightly coloured rocks that are painted with polka-dots on the rocks are the words; “peace”, “love”, “joy”, “Jesus”, “faith” and “forgave” on a blue plate.



A photograph of 3 children named Hosanna, Jason, Daniel (left to right) are sitting on the couch and show their painted rocks in their hands. On the table there is a plate of brightly coloured rocks with multiple polka-dots.



A photograph of 2 children named Hosanna and Daniel (left to right) are sitting focused on painting their rocks. Hosanna is painting her rock using pink paint. Daniel is painting his rock using yellow paint.

HOW I BUILD FRIENDSHIPS DURING THIS PANDEMIC - *Yaro Romanov*

A few weeks ago, I had a zoom call with Anne. During the call, I talked about how my life was going. I talked about many things such as how my first year of high school was going and what had changed in the past few months and how my relationships with friends continued.

During a part of the conversation, I talked about who my real friends were and how I interacted with them. Friends were a very influential part of life and during this pandemic. I started to really think carefully about who I was hanging out with. I decided to focus on people that make me feel positive.

My friends and I interacted by communicating online, by playing video games, video calling each other, and sometimes meeting up in person. For example, a few days ago I hung out with a couple close friends that lived near my house. We played physically distanced basketball.

If you're wondering how we play basketball during this time we physically distance from each other. We usually try to stay apart when the one team is on offence. As for the defending team, you can get a bit closer but you obviously can't touch them in general, because it would be considered a foul. Obviously, that's not keeping your distance. If you want even more distance no matter what you can shout out "Isol", which is short for isolation. Everyone will give you lots of space to make your shot or dribble without having the opposing team try to defend against you.

So, in the end we are trying our best to be able to hang out with our friends. Nowadays, we find ways to interact without getting too close to each other like before but still finding ways to have fun.

FRIENDSHIP CIRCLE - Eleanor (age 9)

Tuesday was my favourite day of the week last year because it's when we had friendship circle. I looked forward to it all week. My friend and I would ask our teacher, Mr. R. if it was time yet for friendship circle, over and over again.

The people that were in it made it special - my friends and the people running it were so nice. I loved the crafts and board games that we played.

It was still fun when we had virtual friendship circle. Some things were harder at times, like you couldn't be with people, but it was still really fun and I'm glad we got to have it. I was happy to see the same people every week.



An art piece by Gabriel Vomisescu made of different shades of brown fabric lay together on a purple background. At the bottom there is a black belt with a silver buckle. In the middle there are two, dark blue bowls sitting side-by-side. The bowl on the right has a star shape in the middle.

BEING A HOST IS LIFE CHANGING - *Paige Deeth*

My experience as a host for Extend-A-Family has been life changing. I became a host during a time in my life where I found myself lacking purpose due to the outbreak of the pandemic.

Getting involved with this organization gave my long quarantine days meaning and something to look forward to in a scary unprecedented time. I have been a host since May 2020 and cherish all the memories and experiences I have gained during this time. Becoming a host gave me the opportunity to get to know a wonderful girl named Shermineh. Shermineh and I got to know each other in a non- traditional Extend-A-Family way. Our meetings were unique due to the pandemic. We had to build our friendship through a virtual space. Although this was not ideal and was very new to Shermineh and I, it did not stop us from connecting and building a meaningful friendship. We got to know each other through our weekly FaceTime calls, occurring twice a week, every week for an hour.

Before meeting Shermineh I knew that we had various similarities including loving to draw, doing arts and crafts as well as dancing and singing! I knew it wouldn't be easy to incorporate these shared interests online,

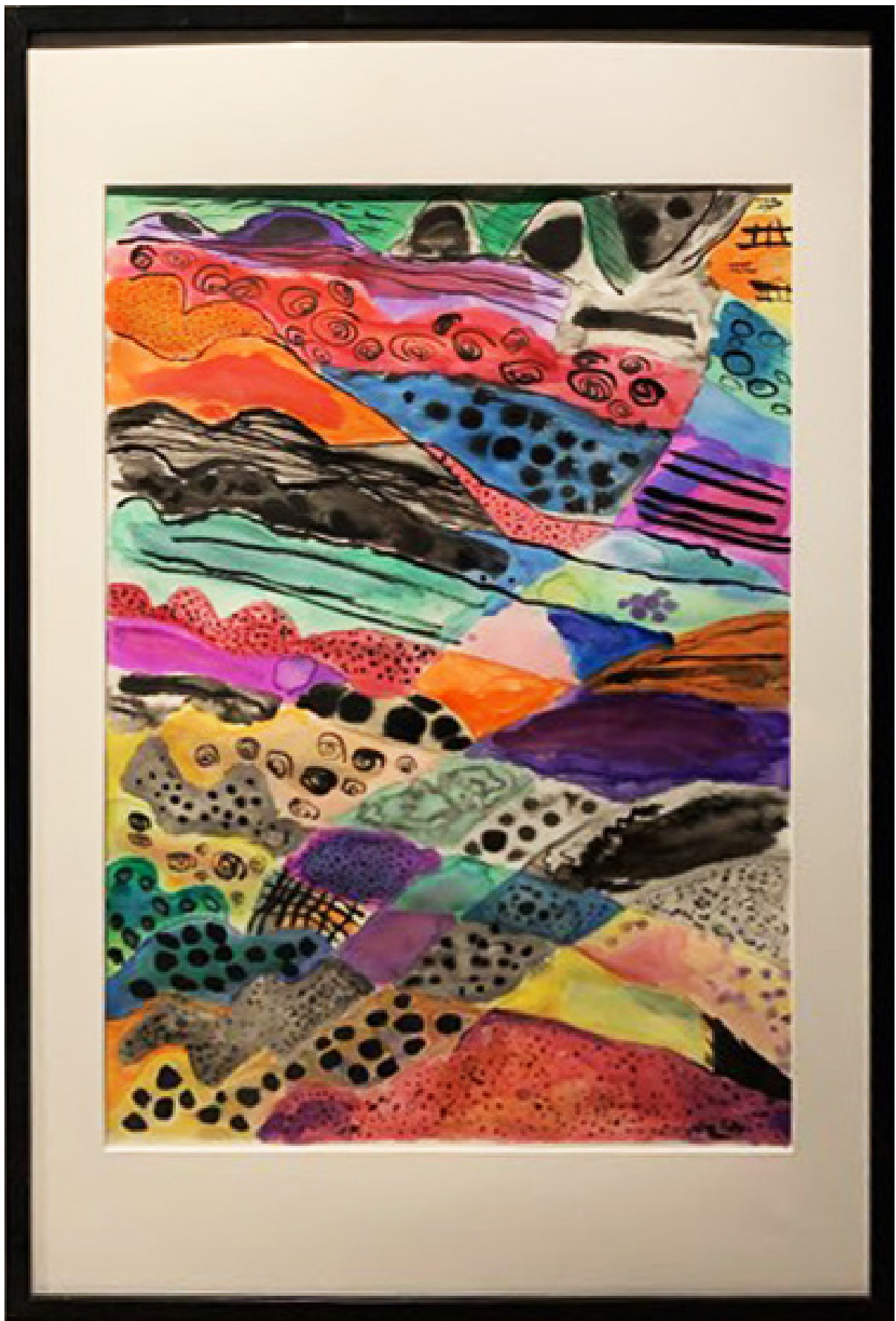
but I thought of creative activities we could do together separately at home through FaceTime that would allow us to share our common interests with each other.

The first couple of meetings with Shermineh went very well. I organized various fun activities that allowed us to get to know each other and gain a sense of comfort with talking on FaceTime. After a couple of meetings, we had formed a wonderful connection. I could see her becoming more comfortable with me, wanting to be funny and could see her having fun and it was great to see! Shermineh and I eventually did not need to plan activities to do during the calls. We would just chat the whole time, and we learned our time was best spent together talking and laughing about anything. We would have fun during our calls no matter what we were talking about.

I am so grateful for the friendship I have built with Shermineh. It is a very special friendship that I will always cherish and thank Extend-A-Family for. Being a host for Extend-A-Family is one of the most rewarding things I have ever done. I have learned so much from Shermineh and have found the calls to be heart-warming.



A painting by Daniel Ekanayake, a yellow and a brown hand are interlocked with the planet Earth in the middle. There is a green and blue background that has been done with water colours. At the top "Love Your Neighbour" is written.



A drawing of different multi-coloured squares with different patterns. Some with varying sizes of polka dots, some with stripes, some with spirals. There are also some squares with curved peaks.
By Julian Fabbri

FROM ZOOM TO ZOOMING ON A WAGON

When we say yes to the possibility of entering into a relationship, we don't know what journey will unfold and where we might go. But part of the energy of doing so, can bring new and unbelievable growth in who we are becoming, as we see new sights. Ollie, Aiden and Louis have discovered this on their wagon ride, while out picking apples in September.

Just as COVID-19 was unfolding in March 2020, Ollie and Louis's mother Kate had completed all the required steps to become a host family. Kate was familiar with Extend-A-Family and wanted her son Ollie to connect with someone his age. Not letting the restrictions of meeting in person be a deterrent, a Zoom meeting was scheduled with Bernice (Mom), Aiden (son), Kate and Ollie. Magic unravelled as these two boys of similar age, created such enthusiasm and fondness from that first Zoom moment. Immediately they shared their interests of playing the ukulele, harmonica and piano, and their love of Octonauts. They were the teacher to the coordinator as they shared pictures, toys and with detail, the world of Octonauts. When asked if they would like to meet again, they responded with an overwhelming 'Yes, tomorrow.' Kate and Bernice, as their proudest advocates, made visits happen on a regular basis, even with creativity to meet in person "at a distance" riding bikes in the local school parking lot.

The capacity to build relationships is endless and can start with saying "Yes" to connect as a host, as a friend, or to the adventures of picking apples and travelling on a wagon to the next places.



A photograph of three children (left to right) Ollie, Aiden and Louis sit on a grey wagon they are all wearing masks. In the background there are rows of apple trees.

Extend-A-Family offers a variety of support groups across Toronto.

Visit our website, connect with staff or the office for information.

Web: www.extendafamily.ca ■ **Email:** info@extendafamily.ca

Phone: 416 484 1317

ADULT SIBLING SUPPORT GROUP

Location: Virtual

Time and Day: 7:00pm-9:00pm, once a month on Thursdays

Contact: Ahmad Jabbir 647-824-4252, aj@extendafamily.ca

DADS' GROUP

Location: Virtual

Time and Day: 7:00pm-9:00pm, once a month on Tuesdays

Contact: Salvatore Rocchese 416-530-0272, sr@extendafamily.ca

EAST TORONTO EVENING PARENT GROUP

Location: Virtual

Time and Day: 7:00pm-8:30pm, once a month on Wednesdays

Contact: Kim Southern-Paulsen 416-757-2780, ksp@extendafamily.ca

SAFE & SECURE FUTURES NETWORKS – EAST

Location: Virtual

Time and Day: 7:00pm-8:30pm, once a month on Tuesdays

Contact: Kristen Carhart 647-292-5175, ssfne@extendafamily.ca

SAFE & SECURE FUTURES NETWORKS – WEST

Location: Virtual

Time and Day: 7:00pm-8:30pm, once a month on Tuesdays

Contact: Alyssa Grace Marshall 416-239-7161, ssfnw@extendafamily.ca

ACT SUPPORT GROUP (ACCEPTANCE AND COMMITMENT THERAPY)

Location: Virtual

Time and Day: 7:00pm- 9:00pm, once a month on Tuesdays

Contact: Lee Steel 647-324-9491, lee.steel@extendafamily.ca

WEST PARENT SUPPORT GROUP

Please contact if interested:

Contact: Marissa Wolicki 647-292-5357, mw@extendafamily.ca



WELCOME TO RACHAEL WALLACE

My name is Rachael and I have been a Coordinator with Extend-A-Family since December 2019. Prior to this, I was an Inclusive Recreation Assistant with Extend-A-Family in the summer of 2018. My educational background is in Primary/Junior Education and I hold a diploma from Centennial College as a Developmental Services Worker, both of which have given me vast experience with supporting children, youth, adults and their families. It has been amazing to extend my learning into practice, while continuing to learn life lessons which cannot be taught in school. I am passionate about working in partnership with families to achieve the rich and meaningful good things in life. It is an honour to work, learn and grow in such a supportive and welcoming environment with my colleagues, families and community members.

WELCOME BACK JESSICA JANES AND NUSRAT MOTALA

These Coordinators have been away on parental leave since 2019. We look forward to having them back in 2021 to once again be a part of our Extend-A-Family team!



FAREWELL TO JOY ALMA

We would like to acknowledge Joy Alma for her time as a former Coordinator at Extend-A-Family. Joy, we wish you continued success in your new role at Community Living Ontario. As well, all the best to your family and to your two boys, Ryder and Magnus.

FAREWELL TO MICHELLE

Michelle has been our go-to person when we have been in a crunch. She has filled in for us on two occasions. Her gentle spirit and inclusion focus has been an asset, she will be missed. We wish her continued success in her future endeavours

FAREWELL TO MACKENZIE MEEK, FORMER BOARD TREASURER

We appreciate MacKenzie's genuine support and contribution to Extend-A-Family and wish her well in her future endeavours!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to the members of the Extend-A-Family Board of Directors who continue to contribute their time, talent, expertise and provide guidance to the organization.

Thank you to Extend-A-Family funders: Ontario Ministry of Children, Community & Social Services, City of Toronto and Service Canada.

Thank you to Salima Hussein our former Program Supervisor, for her genuine support to Extend-A-Family.

We welcome Matthew Lee, our current Program Supervisor for his enthusiasm and guidance to Extend-A-Family.

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.

Thank you to Schools:

Brown Public School
Corvette Junior Public School
Highcastle Public School
Leslieville Public School
Dr Marion Hilliard Senior Public School

Thank you to Community Partners:

Durham Association for Families and Support
East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club
Families for a Secure Future
MLSE Launchpad
West Scarborough Boys and Girls Club

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: _____

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