



member to member connection

Breaking through barriers for workers who have children with special needs
N° 27 Winter 2013

When Gabriel was 3 years old he was diagnosed with severe autism. Now, Gabriel is 17 years old, non verbal and has sensory issues. We dedicated our life to care for him every day without being squeamish about it. This has been the biggest journey of our lives. Loving him and caring for him teaches us to be more understanding, accepting and loving of someone who is weak and in need. At the same time we have to be together to be strong and to help him develop according to his needs and his own gifts. Thanks for the support from the Special Needs Project. It's helped us improve the life of our son and for him to participate in the autism programs at the Geneva Centre. Thank you very much to everyone working for this wonderful project. Special thanks to Nancy B., our advisor. Thank you all—you people are great!

Letter Carrier
Brampton, ON



Our daughter Jazzmyn is a 3 year old little girl who has a contagious smile and laugh. She was born with Complex Congenital Heart Disease and has had 2 open-heart surgeries to date. Jazzmyn is scheduled to have mitral valve replacement surgery at Sick Kids in Toronto at the end of May. This will require her to be on anticoagulant medication for the rest of her life. Being the parent of a sick child is both amazing and emotional. Jazzmyn has had more surgeries and doctors appointments than anyone else in our family. She handles everything she has to deal with gracefully and without complaints. We are so very proud of our “Jazziel”. She is such an awesome gift.

Letter Carrier
London, ON





"If your child likes sports try the Special Olympics."



It has been many years since I have written for the Member-to-Member Connection but I remain grateful for all they have done for myself and my family over the years. It has afforded my son many opportunities that otherwise would have been missed due to cost issues.

My son Drew was diagnosed with kidney disease at just two weeks of age and as a result has been left with chronic impaired kidneys and also incontinence. Drew is now 13 years old and is being watched carefully as he goes through puberty. It is a crucial time for Drew. We and the doctors are hopeful his kidneys can keep up with all the changes that puberty brings.

The Special Needs project has also helped us purchase equipment that is worn at bedtime that is very costly. We could not have done so well with our son without your help and support. I always look forward to the phone calls as well [from our Special Needs Advisor], what a great way to vent! Thanks for all you do Pat M., you are truly a saint!

Postal Clerk
Stellarton, NS



My daughter Brittney is 24 years old and very active. She is involved in the Special Olympics. This is a sports oriented program for individuals with developmental disabilities. The Special Olympics is Brittney's social life. She bowls, curls, swims and plays soccer. Brittney enjoys meeting her friends during her activities. During her 7 years with Special Olympics Ontario Brittney has travelled a lot with her team. She's been to London, Windsor, Brampton, St. Catherine's, Oakville, Burlington, Oshawa, Kingston and recently Montreal. This experience has helped my daughter learn to be independent. If your child likes sports try the Special Olympics. You can find out more by checking out www.specialolympics.ca Let your child try.

PO-4
Hamilton, ON



You can now submit your stories and photos to the Member-to-Member Connection newsletter by visiting our website at www.specialneedsproject.ca.

Go to our home page and click on the icon of the newsletter in the top right hand corner.

Share Your Story

For CUPW and UPCE Members.





My son Graeme is 11 years old and has Autism Spectrum Disorder and ADHD. The original plan for a summer activity for Graeme was to find a day camp with a musical theme. Graeme is quite gifted musically – it’s the way his autistic brain is wired. I had no luck. All the camps I found were very intense full day programs which I thought would bore him.

In the end I decided to set up some music lessons for him at a local school and thought to combine that with some music-themed respite outings (Jazz Fest, CBC music plaza, etc). I thought I’d create our own little summer music experience that would work for Graeme. We showed up at the first lessons in July only to find out the teacher had cancelled his whole summer music schedule and no one had thought to contact us. I started to freak out a bit and then I remembered a name and number for a bass clarinet (Graeme’s instrument) teacher that I was given when we first purchased his instrument.

We contacted Mike Dowler, who agreed to give Graeme lessons. Things really took off from there.

Graeme and Mike hit it off. It turns out Mike is Assistant Director at the UBC Summer Music Institute. After a few lessons he asked if Graeme would like to sit in with a visiting school band that needed a bass clarinet player. The band’s practice schedule was perfect: one week, Monday to Friday from 9 am to noon, with a performance on Saturday. Graeme had a wonderful week. He still gets emails from one of the girls in the band and now says he wants to go to UBC for university and to take music.

In BC the supports for higher functioning kids is scaled right back in high school. We are cross boundary for our elementary school which means Graeme will be going to high school without his friends. He will be one of 1700 kids in a new high school. I see music being a very important part of his transition from elementary school. Currently music is something Graeme is very good at. His peers recognize that and it not only gives him “social glue” in some circles but his band teacher has created a “Junior Conductor” position for him with the junior band. This gives him leadership and social opportunities in an area he has ability and confidence.

As Graeme moves into high school I see his ability in music giving him a chance at a smaller specialty program. Failing that, in a regular school stream I see it giving him a subject he likes, a place to start a social group, and an opportunity to share with others something he is good at and feels confident about.

Music ticks so many boxes for Graeme – confidence, academic success, social opportunities, respect from peers, options for different school programs, calming, etc. I remember reading in one of the newsletters about a family who used their Special Needs funding to help pay for their son’s music program and what a difference it made. I know how they feel. I think music is going to be an important piece of the puzzle that is Graeme.

Letter Carrier
Vancouver, BC





"We are so happy she can be with her friends and be safe."



Many thanks to my counsellor, Marie-Claude C., and the Special Needs Project, for the information and support they have given me and my daughter.

Alexandera took part in the 2013 Sports Challenge and won two medals: a gold in the 60-metre race, and a bronze in the 4 x 100 metre free-style swim relay.

Again, thanks to all of you!

Last summer the Special Needs Project helped us provide Haleigh-Jo with a little independence. We found a (used) tricycle for her. She can now ride with her friends who think her new bike is so "cool". Haleigh is unable to ride a 2 wheel bicycle because of her condition, but she sure has been able to ride on her own with her new bike! We are so happy for her that she can be with her friends and be safe. We are thankful for your kind support to help us buy this for her. Thank you so much, Kenda, Henry and Haleigh-Jo.

RSMC
Finch, ON



PO1
Laval, QC





Our son Jonah is 7 years old. He was diagnosed with autism at the age of 2. He has had speech therapy since he was 3. Despite his limited vocalization, he is fun, loving, affectionate and a very active young boy. From the start we have focused on his social interaction. He joined different classes available to him through the community and through different agencies such as Erin Oak Kids and Community Living Mississauga. He loves the water and has been taking swimming lessons at a local community centre. He is now able to swim all by himself and hold his breath under water for a long period of time. Over the years, Jonah has also showed interest in animals. We bought him fish and birds. He is also fond of cats and dogs. Last year, Erin Oak started a pilot program about riding horses. We were very fortunate that Jonah was one of the few selected to try this program. He did amazingly well and since then we have enrolled him in riding lessons. It took a few trials with different horses to find the right match for Jonah. We finally found “Percy” who has a lot of movement and loves to trot just as much as Jonah. We look forward to more riding lessons at Caledon Equestrian Riding School. Therapeutic riding helps improve Jonah’s social, communication, motor and response skills. There is so much Jonah can do. The financial support has allowed our son to be involved in as many activities as he is able.

I would like to thank

the Special Needs Project for helping my son get to where he is today. The project has helped me deal with costs like tutoring, respite care and care-aides to support him. I am proud to say my son is graduating this year. Thank you to everyone that has worked with me on this journey. I would especially like to thank Sheila, my advisor. You have been a great help.

Letter Carrier
Oliver, BC

Letter Carrier
Mississauga, ON





"It's an exchange: I'm giving but I'm getting back."

Advisor grateful for relationships, connections

For Sheila Stashuk-Sanchez, working as an advisor in the Special Needs and Moving On projects is primarily about "making connections, honouring that families are willing to share, and understanding it's an exchange: I'm giving but I'm getting back."

When she saw a posting at her workplace for a project advisor about 13 years ago, she thought it was "awesome" that a union had started a program to support families with children who have disabilities. "It is hard to balance all the areas of your life when you are also having struggles with your children."

Stashuk-Sanchez works at a center for children and families in Nanaimo, B.C., and also has a private practice where she offers individual and relationship counseling, consultation and training for organizations. She has worked with families and children who have disabilities for 15 years, and has a background in mental health issues that spans 35 years. She has trained extensively in a variety of psychotherapeutic practices as well as holistic practices such as Reiki, Therapeutic Touch and Feng Shui.

Stashuk-Sanchez takes a "systems approach" to her counseling work and her job as an advisor. "You can't work with a child unless you work with the parents, and parents need to know there is no problem they can't solve. I am just supporting them in the process—offering some information on resources, ideas and options. There are all sorts of issues: from emotional and psycho-social issues to 'how can I get services or advocate for my child?', or how their workplace is supporting them or the impact the disability has on their lives."

Developing a relationship with the families is an important component of her approach and key to supporting families to move forward.

"I have met some great and interesting people who have shared some of their intimate details with me. I really look forward to calling the families to find out what has happened. The parents often talk to me about the skills and strengths their child has acquired—all the



fantastic achievements—and the relief of having those dollars that help every month, whether for developing gross motor skills, an activity their children can attend, or tutoring, or a support person."

Over the years she has made a strong connection with many of the 11 families she calls. One parent made an effort to find her after leaving the project, coming to meet her at her workplace with a photo album. "She showed me her family and gave me a big hug. It was so nice, so exciting to finally put a face to her."

Stashuk-Sanchez is an energetic, positive person from a close family that includes parents, two siblings, her husband, their 28-year-old daughter and three dogs. She keeps a gratitude jar in which she and her family put a slip of paper every day with something they are grateful for. "We read them out on New Year's. We get blessings every day, and when you're grateful you get more of them."



How does postal transformation affect your work-life balance?

CUPW hears daily that stress is mounting from the implementation of Postal Transformation (PT) and is taking its toll on members. Forced overtime, loss of day shifts, changes in work hours, loss of jobs, fewer opportunities for job rotation, modified duties or transfers have created challenges for many. Balancing work and family responsibilities has become increasingly difficult. We have begun to hear about the additional stresses experienced by members with children who have special needs.

Research has found that work-life conflict is associated with poorer health, anxiety and depression, higher levels of stress, decreased job satisfaction and increased turnover and absenteeism. The union is concerned about the work-life conflict experienced by both internal and external workers and wants to learn more.

The union has just launched a third party study to document and examine the challenges arising from the introduction of PT, and provide the type of evidence we can use to negotiate improvements in the workplace. It will also help us explore if and how we can help reduce work-life conflict, and if we can minimize the additional challenges arising from PT for parents of children with special needs.

CUPW is working with an external consultant, Jane Beach and Associates, who has extensive experience in research and policy and who has worked with us on a number of our child care projects. She will be working closely with our National Child Care Coordinator, who will provide project management and oversight.

The research is being undertaken in five locals where PT is well underway.

- Edmonton
- Winnipeg
- Scarborough
- Montreal
- St. John's

The study will include face to face consultations and a survey mailed out to all members in the five identified locals. As well, a telephone survey will be conducted with all our members who are part of our Special Needs project, who are in any local where Postal Transformation has taken place.

The work is now underway. Members who are part of the Special Needs project affected by PT will be contacted by their Advisor to participate in the survey in late January/early February during their regular Advisor calls. In late spring, a report of the findings will be made available to all locals across the country.





Season's Greetings from your friends at the Special Needs and Moving On projects



Special Needs and Moving On Advisors:

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Angelia B.

Anne G.

Arlie R.

Bernadette M.

Charmaine M.

Cherie G.

Colette M.

Donald G.

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Jamie Kass

Doris Tremblay

UPCE-PSAC:

François Paradis

May peace, joy
and prosperity
fill your home
now and throughout
the new year!

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Thank you to the children at First Avenue School Aged Program at the Glebe Parents Daycare Centre in Ottawa for the drawings.