



member to member connection

Breaking through barriers for workers who have children with special needs

N° 43 Winter 2021

Mathis was eleven October of 2021. When he was born, he was very sick. The fact that he was born prematurely certainly didn't help. When he was barely two months old, the visits to the hospital began to multiply: repeated pneumonia, severe asthma attacks, hydration problems...

In February 2011, after several episodes of pneumonia, asthma, and others, Mathis was transferred by ambulance to Ste-Justine Hospital. The doctors didn't know what to do. A week later, after several exams, Mathis wasn't doing better. He came close – very close – to dying. He was choking and hardly breathing. Fortunately, we had excellent doctors. He pulled through. He was monitored very closely, and his medication was adjusted several times, but he is healthy now.

Recently, Mathis was diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD). It was a bombshell for us, but not for him. It's normal for him to be the way he is. He finds social interactions very difficult. With the help of specialists, we are able to manage the situation better. With the help of the Special Needs Project, we were able to offer him developmental camps adapted for children with ASD, to help him reach his goal for the summer of 2021: to play baseball for Les Élités de Lanaudière, at the AA level (U11). He succeeded and had a great season! He even hit an outfield home run. As they say, anyone can achieve their goals, regardless of their physical and mental condition. Congratulations, Mathis!



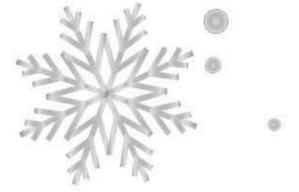
Mathis

Letter Carrier
Sainte-Anne-des-Plaines, QC





"I am very proud of my beautiful boy."



The help you give us brings us hope for the future, both for me and for my son, Sean-William. His grades went down because of COVID-19, but thanks to your help, he had access to a tutor who was able to come and help him more often. His grades have gone up just enough to get him to grade 6.

I am very proud of my beautiful boy, as he has many challenges to overcome in everyday life. Despite being bullied, he ends the day with a beautiful smile after our discussions about life and how some people don't know or understand his struggles. He is incredibly sweet, and has big, beautiful dreams for the future.

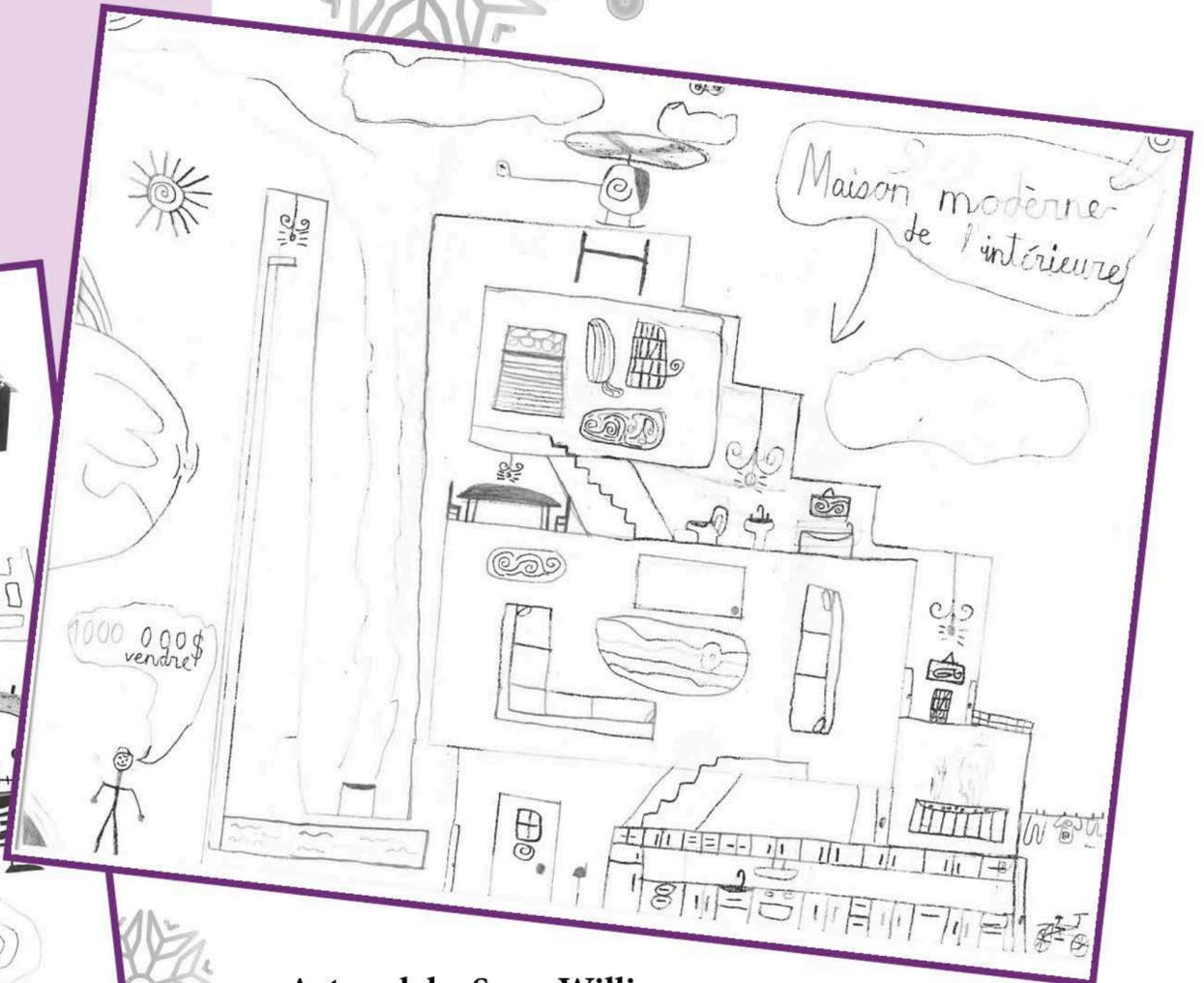
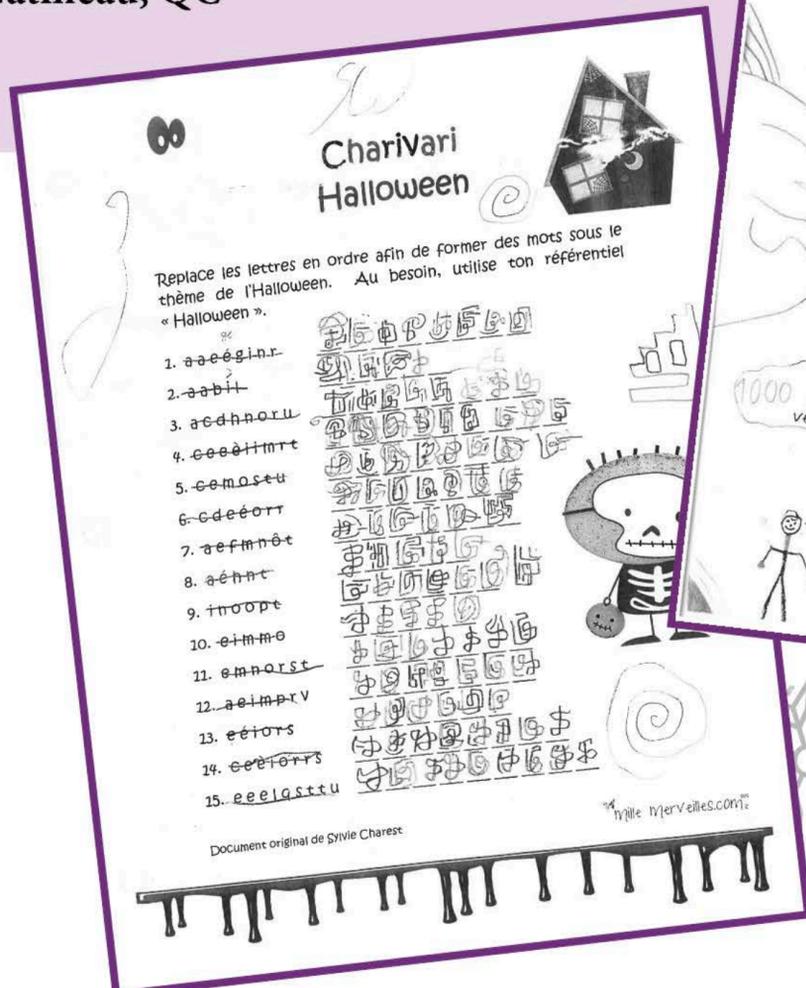
Every night when I turn off the light, he says goodnight to his late grandfather and tells me, "You are the best mom in the world." I love you unconditionally, Mom.

Thank you all!

PO-4
Gatineau, QC



Sean-William



Artwork by Sean-William



"He is proud of all his hard work."



Derek's Journey

Derek's weight loss journey began March 8, 2017, the day he moved into Cornerstone Community Home. He weighed 302 pounds at the start of his journey. He was determined to lose weight with a goal of being able to play Special Olympics floor hockey. He began following a daily calorie intake that was suggested by a dietician and his family doctor. He also began walking short distances at first. He would take a few steps and sit down for a break then take a few more. Gradually he increased his stamina and was able to do laps around Cornerstone parking lot without a break. Now he can walk all the way around the block and come home and do his weights several times a day!!

Derek has lost 132 pounds to date and now plays bowling, hockey and goes to dances and enjoys all activities he is offered. All along the way on his weight loss journey he would talk about how proud his mother would be of him and how she is always watching over him. Derek lost his mother in May 2017 but always shares his successes with her in heaven. He now helps baking diabetic cookies, sweeping the floor at home and tidying his room. He is always looking for ways to help.

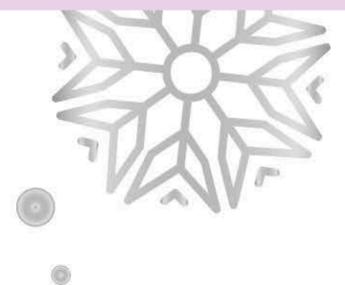
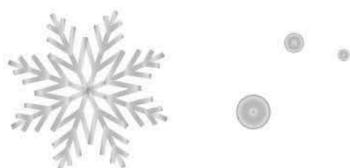
He loves being part of his hockey team, The Wolf Pack, and playing hockey. He looks forward to his weekly practices. He couldn't wait for hockey to start back up as it stopped during COVID. He kept up his exercise and weight loss while patiently waiting for hockey to resume. He has had so many amazing opportunities since joining Special Olympics and even traveled to Thunder Bay Ontario with his team. He has made many lifelong friends and worked very hard to get where he is today. He is proud of all his hard work and plans to keep it up in the future.

Derek represented Canada Special Olympics on an athletes panel hosted (on Zoom) by Special Olympics International. USA media personality and cardiothoracic surgeon, Dr. Oz, hosted the panel. Derek shared his story, talked about his fitness and health journey, and how his coach, Don Vaters, helped and inspired him. Derek is now helping other athletes advocate for their own health.

Derek lives in Cornerstone Community Home, his small option home in Sydney, NS. The Cornerstone Community Home is one of the programs supported by Breton Ability Centre. Breton Ability Centre administers the Special Needs and Moving On projects for CUPW/UPCE-PSAC.



Derek before and after





"They have become explorers of the world around them."

One of our Québec members wanted to share information about a program that made a huge difference in the life of her son Jimmy. She says, "It has helped him learn and make friends." She sent us this article which describes the **Phone it Forward** program by the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB Foundation). It was written by Louise Fraser and originally posted on the CNIB website on April 8, 2021.

Smartphones: a springboard to independence and friendship

The idea of connecting with friends

over the phone is not new, but could a smartphone link two randomly matched individuals and allow a beautiful friendship to flourish between them?

Gaétan and Jimmy's story shows us that yes, it is possible, with the help of iPhones and the mentorship provided by the CNIB Foundation's **Phone it Forward** program.

Nowadays, smartphones are considered essential and most people take them for granted. But for blind or partially sighted people, a smartphone is more than just a means of communication; it is an all-in-one accessibility tool. Unfortunately, such a device is out of reach for many. The **Phone it Forward** program not only puts an iPhone in their hands, but also provides them with the training they need to use the phone with confidence.

At first, Gaétan says he was like a big brother to Jimmy, meeting him for coffee and encouraging him to familiarize himself with his smartphone. "I go at his pace", says Gaétan. He lets Jimmy learn at his own speed, taking into account his many physical challenges. "Finding solutions is a team effort", says Gaétan. "We have fun through it all."

Gaétan's enthusiasm for technology and Jimmy's learning is evident. He describes how their relationship has grown into a strong friendship. They no longer only have the iPhone in common. They cook together, go for walks, listen to music and TV shows, just like any other friends.



Jimmy

With the help of their phones, Gaétan and Jimmy have become explorers of the world around them. These devices are truly learning tools that facilitate their independence. Gaétan lists some of the tasks that smartphones allow them to do independently:

Checking the Weather Forecast

Calling Someone

Listening to Music

Locating Objects

Taking Pictures

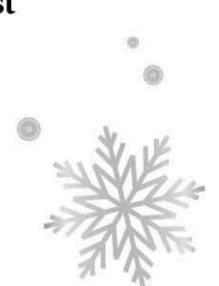
Following a Recipe

Reading

Knowing the Price of an Item by Scanning the Barcode

Figuring out the Colour of Something

Playing Games Adapted for Visually Impaired and Blind Persons



It can help a person silently show they need help.



With the help of his phone, Jimmy discovered a Facebook group on his own and made new friends.

Gaétan is visibly proud of his protégé's progress and discoveries. He explains triumphantly how smartphones are helping increase their independence and freedom. "Having a smartphone is as interesting as having a dog!" He explains that these devices are really life-changing, and that they make a difference as big as "night and day". Gaétan points to the striking changes that Jimmy has experienced, especially in regard to his stronger independence and his new outlook on life. Jimmy is now much happier after going through a dark period in his life.

For Gaétan, seeing Jimmy blossom is proof that his volunteer work with the program is meaningful. "It's heartwarming and rewarding to see all that Jimmy is able to do", he says.

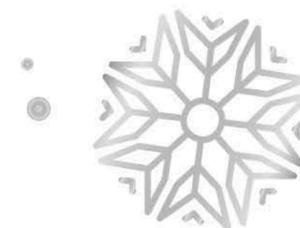
The two friends are so grateful for what the **Phone it Forward** program has given them that they plan to volunteer together to collect phones to give others who are on the program's waiting list the same opportunity to develop new interests and friendships.



Jimmy and Mom



Gaétan and Jimmy



If you are interested in volunteering for the CNIB Foundation, or if you have a smartphone to donate to a blind or partially sighted person like Gaétan and Jimmy, contact the Foundation for more information, or visit www.phoneitforward.ca to learn more about the **Phone it Forward** program.

Signal For Help

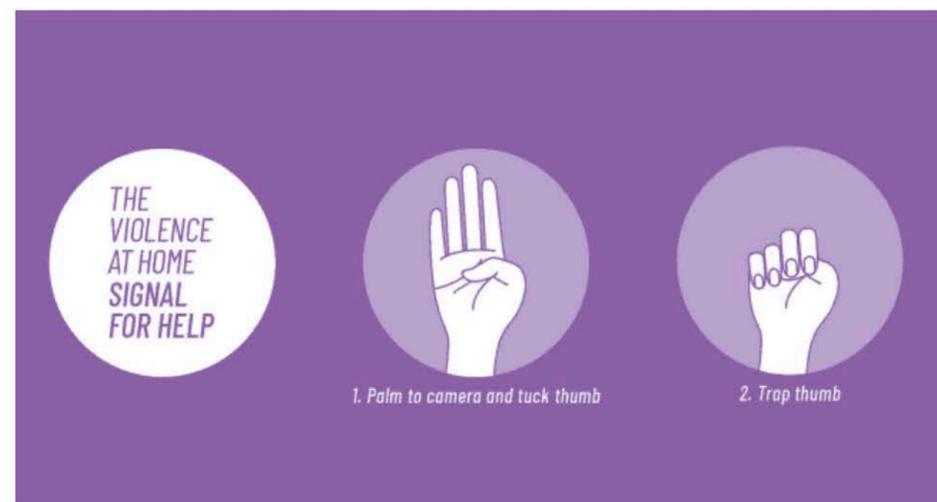
The social isolation measures necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic are making it more difficult for those who are at risk of abuse or violence to safely reach out for help.

"**Signal for Help**" is a simple one-handed sign someone can use on a video call. It can help a person silently show they need help and want someone to check in with them in a safe way.

There's ample evidence that disaster situations can lead to a surge in gender-based violence. Public health directives on home isolation might increase danger and risk for people in abusive relationships.

The **Signal for Help** is a tool that may help some people, some of the time. Some people do not have the ability to make video calls. Please find other resources, services, and programs below that may be helpful in an unsafe situation at home.

The **Signal for Help** was launched by the Canadian Women's Foundation in response to COVID-19, and is now being shared by partner organizations around the world. If you are an organization that would like to launch **Signal for Help** in your own country or region, get in touch with us at info@canadianwomen.org.





"We should be proud."

This year marks the 25th Anniversary of the Special Needs Project.

While we celebrate, we wanted to take the opportunity to remember that it was made possible by the early efforts of women postal workers to make child care an issue for their union and Canada Post.

We invited several CUPW women to take part in a virtual Fireside Chat to talk about these early days. To get at the "story behind the story" of the Child Care Fund and the *Special Needs and Moving On Projects*. Women like Huguette LeBlanc, Marion Pollack, Lynn Bue, Cathy Kennedy, and Jeanie Campbell took part and shared and remembered long forgotten struggles and victories.

In the words of Jeanie Campbell, "This whole conversation has been wonderful. We don't sound like militant women, but we were in our day, and we did it! I remember being on negotiations, way back when. We were sitting in the car coming back from a round of negotiations and Geoff Bickerton put on Billy Bragg singing *The Internationale*, and we were all singing along. There was this writer with us and she asked, 'Why aren't you people writing your history?' And I said, 'Because we're too busy making it.' And we have made it. And we should be proud of that. I'm very proud."

The full transcript of our Fireside Chat will be in the next edition of the CUPW Rose magazine. It will also be posted on the *Special Needs and Moving On Projects* website at specialneedsproject.ca





I am a single mother of a beautiful 10-year-old girl called Océanne. With the financial assistance of the project, she has a tutor who helps her with her homework, which was extremely difficult with me. The psychoeducator explained that since I am an authority figure, Océanne doesn't want to disappoint me and is afraid I won't like her because of her challenges. When it came time to do her homework, she was unresponsive and anxious, even before she started.

Océanne has Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder and Impulsivity (ADHD-I), in addition to being dyslexic and dysorthographic. So the project's very valuable help has changed our lives: much less frustration, anxiety and tantrums. I am very lucky, because despite everything, Océanne loves school and doesn't want to miss a single day! I must say that she has a very good school with dedicated and involved teachers.

Thank you for your support.

LC-1

Trois-Rivières, QC



Mom and Océanne



Océanne



Nour with Mom and Dad

We have just joined the *Special Needs and Moving On Projects* and we already feel supported. Thank you! It's not just about the money, it's about the feeling of community. They are people who listen to us and understand us. We have read the testimonies of parents like us who have benefited from the project for years, and the first word that came to mind was FAMILY. The project is a big family that supports each other. It is encouraging!

Our boy Nour, 10 years old, has a global developmental delay with a mild disability. He loves to dance and is always smiling. Recently, he told us: "I will grow up, become a man and have a family and children. You Mom, you will be a grandma, and you Dad, you will be a grandpa." That's all we ask for: that our child be happy and independent! Thank you to all of you!

LC-1

St-Amable, QC



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

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

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Member-to-Member Connection

is the newsletter of the Special Needs and Moving On Projects. It is produced by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and the Union of Postal Communications Employees-Public Service Alliance of Canada.

The Child Care Fund is administered by the Canadian Union of Postal Workers and financed by the Canada Post Corporation.

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