

INSPIRATIONS



Célébrons nos communautés inclusives Celebrating inclusive communities

Vol. 10 No. 1

Fall 2017 / Winter 2018
Automne 2017 / Hiver 2018

www.inspirationsnews.com

Follow us on
Suivez-nous sur



Teen living with SMA inspires others to stay positive, dream big

By Valentina Basilicata

Like many recent high school graduates, Sammy Cavallaro has exciting plans for his future. It's not surprising the 17-year-old honour student is pursuing a business marketing degree at John Abbott College. This young entrepreneur already has over two million followers on his sports-related Instagram page (@sickhighlights) and plans to launch a related clothing line in the near future. What's Sammy's secret to staying motivated? "My motto in life is, 'everyday is a good day,'" he says.

Sammy was diagnosed with spinal muscular atrophy (SMA) at nine months. This genetic motor neuron disease affects the part of the nervous system that controls voluntary muscle movement. "SMA makes

independence for Sammy impossible," explains his mother Rosa Mariani. "He needs to be dressed, fed, rolled at night, scratched, placed in his motorized wheelchair and taken out. Basically everything that you do for yourself on a daily basis, he needs someone to do for him." Nevertheless, she adds, he is "always very grateful for what life gives him," and there is "never a complaint from his lips."

Though his parents were told he would not live past the age of two, and despite undergoing major surgery to correct a debilitating spinal scoliosis, Sammy continues to thrive and succeed both academically and socially.

Read the full story on page 14 of this edition...

Inside this edition

- | | |
|---|--|
| ■ From the House with MP Mike LakePage 3 | ■ Technology FeaturePages 25, 26, 27 |
| ■ L'été des premières fois avec un enfant autistePage 8 | ■ The Transforming Autism Care ConsortiumPage 28 |
| ■ Autonomy Preparation Program at John Grant High SchoolPage 10 | ■ The Quebec Angelman Syndrome FoundationPage 30 |
| ■ Breaking isolation, one hearing aid at a timePage 16 | ■ Seeing vision loss through a humorous lensePage 33 |
| ■ Canada Shriners Hospital patients #CutTheBullPage 23 | ■ Adapted Travel with Mike CohenPages 34, 35, 36 |



The Cavallaro family celebrate at Sammy's graduation ceremony. (Photo credit, Cavallaro family)

THE DONATOR BURGER

Chef On Call will generously donate a portion of the proceeds from each Donator Burger sold in December to Inspirations

ORDER ONLINE www.chefoncalldelivery.com

OR CALL (514) 844-2044





Teen living with SMA inspires others to stay positive, dream big

continued from cover page...

Vicky Stuhlec, an occupational therapist at the Lester B. Pearson School Board, has been working with Sammy since he started kindergarten at Margaret Manson Elementary School in Kirkland. She refers to her time spent with him as a “privilege.” Last school year, she proudly watched Sammy accept his high school diploma surrounded by classmates and friends at John Rennie’s graduation ceremony.

Over the last 12 years, she and a team of specialists worked together to make Sammy’s mainstream school integration a success. “I remember buying him his first pair of scissors – adapted scissors,” reminisces Vicky. “At the time, Sammy had the use of his right arm. Now he’s down to just his right hand, from the wrist down.”

Integration aids helped Sammy get his work done in class and during exams.

“It’s changed over the years. Initially there were a lot of people writing or scribing for him,” explains Vicky. “We then turned to a more technological approach – people typing for him. All his science notes were on Google drive. He has his iPod Touch which has a remote mouse app that allows him to access and make a laptop function for him.” Sammy can speak well, but his speech is not always loud or articulate enough to be able to use speech-to-text technology.

“Full integration ... benefits the child and I think it’s an amazing learning experience for all the peers and the staff. It changes people’s perspective of any physical disability,” says Vicky. “On the other hand, I totally understand and respect parents who prefer not to have their child integrated. As a parent you need to make a decision that’s going to be right for you and your child.”

Integration was the best choice for Sammy and his family. “John Rennie was a great experience. [I] made friends and did very well in my classes,” Sammy says.

His parents and older sister are proud of everything Sammy has accomplished, but his mom acknowledges his recent graduation was bittersweet. “They were all amazing there with Sammy and myself. We will miss the resource team.”

Rosa is confident her son will have a bright future since new treatments for SMA should soon be available in Canada. Until then, the family will continue to raise funds for SMA research with their annual Valentine’s Day gala. “We worked hard to keep him healthy and happy,” says his mom. “I hope Sammy continues to be the sweet, positive person that he is.”



*Sammy Cavallaro at his graduation ceremony.
(Photo credit, Cavallaro family)*

