



THE NEWSLETTER ABOUT GIANT STEPS

A SCHOOL AND THERAPY CENTRE FOR
ELEMENTARY SCHOOL-AGED CHILDREN
WITH AUTISM SPECTRUM DISORDER

Enabling kids with autism through
academics, therapies, life skills
& inclusion

From our President

On behalf of the Board of Directors at Giant Steps, thank you for taking a few moments to connect with us by catching up on our news.

We hope this newsletter provides you with a snapshot of what Giant Steps is all about - a school & therapy centre where the unique needs of each child are addressed with compassion and expertise by our team using a wide range of educational and therapeutic approaches.

Now affecting as many as 1 in 68 children, autism is quickly becoming one of the most significant public health crises of our time. With your support and engagement, the dedication of our staff and the York Region District School Board, we face this challenge head on, impacting not only the lives of kids with autism today, but their futures as teenagers and adults tomorrow.

Martin Buckingham
Board President



Right to the Source

 We're going right to the source and introducing you to some of our team.

Read on and meet Nick, Stacey and Lori -- a therapist, a teacher and a program assistant -- and get a sense of the learning through work and play that goes on at Giant Steps every day.

Speech & communication deficits are one of the hallmarks of Autism Spectrum Disorder, and speech therapy is a cornerstone of the Giant Steps program.

Nick is our Speech & Language Pathologist: "Working in the therapy room and in our classrooms in collaboration with teachers and other therapists, my job is to provide functional, theoretically sound and evidence-based therapy to children with autism. Whether it's through the use of an augmentative communication device, an iPad or tablet, the Picture Exchange Communication System, or verbally, I have the pleasure of seeing the progress our students are making every day. Their improved communication skills result in greater success in their daily activities at home, at school, and in their communities."

Giant Steps' academic program is delivered by two Special Education teachers from the York Region District School Board.

Stacey is one of our dedicated teachers: "In our busy classroom, we work on functional skills and academics, and my students are showing tremendous improvements in so many areas. Recently, kids like Johnny have been walking to the store, purchasing items on our shopping list and completing a cooking activity with minimal support. Maya's math skills now include calculating the perimeters of squares and rectangles. Connor is reading full sentences and Shane learned how to divide in one week! Many are now using their laptops to complete their language activities; Jack has even started to email his Dad. I am so proud of all my students and their accomplishments this year!"

(Cont'd on Page 2)



Nick helps Alex identify emotions and communicate his wants and needs via the Proloquo2Go app on his iPad



Stacey spends some one-on-one time with Kadin on an academic activity in her classroom

Emma, Then & Now

Emma's family thanks Giant Steps

When our daughter Emma was diagnosed with autism, we were overwhelmed and totally in the dark about what approaches or therapies to try. Emma was an introverted little girl who was non-verbal and had great difficulty focusing on a task or following instructions or routines. She did a lot of pinching and flopping to the floor when frustrated, or when we didn't understand what she wanted or needed.

Emma started Giant Steps in Grade 1, and the team there helped us forge a path for Emma. An Individualized Education Plan was developed by their teachers and therapists with our input, and very specific goals were put in place. Using strategies from a wide variety of therapeutic practices, the staff worked really hard to give Emma the tools to communicate and cope with her challenges, and helped us transition the same programming to home.

Emma has developed in so many ways during her 8 years at Giant Steps. She has transitioned from using picture symbols to communicating in sentences using the Proloquo2Go software on her iPad. She's also started to use her voice and makes very deliberate eye contact when she wants to communicate. Emma enjoys group activities now and is much more independent, social and interactive with her peers. She's patient and able to wait her turn. Her favourite activity at Giant Steps is taking the classroom attendance to the office and asking a peer to accompany her.

We feel so fortunate to have had Giant Steps in our lives. Emma has been well cared for and pushed to meet her full potential. She graduates to high school this June, and we will miss everyone on the Giant Steps team! However, with the strong foundation skills Emma has built, we know there are many more accomplishments ahead as she tackles the challenges of high school.

Rob & Brenda
Emma's parents



(Cont'd from Page 1)

Our Program Assistants are vital to our team, providing support to our students and implementing academic and therapeutic strategies both at Giant Steps and in our kids' local public schools.

Lori reports: "I support 7 year-old William two afternoons a week in a Grade 2 classroom in his local public school. He eagerly greets his classmates and teacher with a high five, and is a welcome member of the class. William takes part in all subjects with the help of verbal and gestural prompts from me and from his peers. With the help of his iPad, he is able to answer simple questions asked by his teacher. His peers include William in group activities like building with Lego and spelling with letter magnets, one of William's favorite activities. What a positive experience for all of us, but especially for William and typical Grade 2 students!"



Lori and William get ready to leave for his neighbourhood school after a morning of therapy and academics at Giant Steps

1st out of 182 charities

What a team!



Giant Steps was thrilled to win Scotiabank's 1st place \$6,000 prize for the largest fundraising team at the 2016 Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon.

With 139 walkers and runners, 1,200+ donations and \$97,000 raised, once again the marathon ensured that our kids benefit from specialized speech, occupational and behavior therapy programs at Giant Steps this year.

We can't say enough about our families, friends, volunteers and donors who made it all happen. Many thanks as well to Scotiabank and Canada Running Series. Bring on Sunday October 22, 2017!



A busy and productive year for our kids, staff & families

Our students receive individualized, coordinated programs of academics, life skills and speech, behaviour and occupational therapies. In addition, many of our children are integrated into their neighbourhood schools with Giant Steps' support.

Here are some highlights of the activities that enriched our core programs this year.

Students

- Skating & swimming lessons
- Occupational therapy food group, preprinting group & social skills groups
- Cooking classes
- Street safety, shopping, farm & Apple Store technology group outings
- Urban Smoke Food truck visit
- Valentine, birthday & Hallowe'en celebrations
- York Region District School Board Special Needs Track Meet
- Greeting the golfers at Unity for Autism's 2016 Golf Classic
- Sports & Rec Club 3 evenings/week



School-wide

- Raising the flag for World Autism Awareness Day
- Colours of the Spectrum Art Show in celebration of Autism Awareness Month
- Parent training sessions with therapists and teachers
- Parent education on legal & estate planning, community resources, ASD & mental health, transitioning to public school classrooms
- Educational placements for students from Queen's University, Mohawk College, Seneca College, Humber College, Thornlea Secondary School
- Sharing our Unity for Autism Snoezelen Room with local community classrooms
- Holiday Festive Feast celebration/visit from Santa
- Parent facebook group and social outings



Staff

- KRG Children's Charitable Foundation Climbing Centre training
- Geneva Centre International Symposium attendance
- Site visit to Giant Steps Montreal
- Autism Speaks/Samsung Look at Me Project participation
- Transition planning with families and high school classroom staff
- Liaison with York University's Psychology Department
- Children's Treatment Network Special Needs Information & Recreation Fair participation
- Professional development on team building/collaboration strategies, Crisis Prevention and Intervention training, first aid/CPR, seizure disorders, positive reinforcement strategies and theory of mind



Fundraising

- Giant Steps Annual Raffle for Kids with Autism
- Scotiabank Toronto Waterfront Marathon
- Autumn Fever Fashion Show & Luncheon
- Aviva Community Fund competition participation
- Giant Steps Rummage Sale
- Youth Brazilian Jiu-Jitsu Tournament
- Flemingdon Park Golf Club Tournament



APPRECIATING OUR DONORS

Our donors of \$500 & more

We couldn't do it without you!

Our therapy programs, technology and resources are funded by our donors, our fundraising activities and our families. It's a team effort, and we appreciate each and every donation.

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