



YM-YWHA adapts to needs with the YCC Special Needs Family Camp

For over 100 years, the YM-YWHA has been providing meaningful programming and services for the Community. From our athletics facilities to arts and craft areas, we offer an inviting place for members of the special needs community. People feel safe and welcome here, they feel they belong, and the Y community would not be the same without them.

For years, the Marlene and Joel King Special Needs Department has catered to the specific needs of its members, and more importantly it has adapted as it has grown. The mandate of the department is

to adapt, foster growth, inspire, empower and to provide respite. The Y has taken this mantra to heart and has taken a pro-active approach to ensuring that current and future offerings are relevant to the needs of its members. In fact, it holds an annual Bridge tournament in support of the Special Needs Department, as well as an annual Y Cycle for Special Needs ride that fundraises specifically to endow funds that benefit the department.

From Horizons day camp to visual art classes, to a drop-in centre and integration and sensitization groups, the Y is always inviting and innovating. Newest in the line-up is the YCC SPECIAL NEEDS Family Camp that will run in August. This unique

camp (the only one of its kind in Canada) is for families with special needs children and their siblings, and will take place at the Harry Bronfman Y Country Camp. It caters to the whole family, allowing members to enjoy the experience of summer camp as a family unit and also separately, in a warm, welcoming atmosphere, with private cabins, and exclusive use of the camp facilities and activities.

As Julie Kristof, Y supporter and mother of Horizons camper, Miriam, put it: "The staff here really have a pulse on the needs of the special needs community and the individuals, and seem to be catering their programming to meet those needs. The family camp for families who have a child

with special needs gives Miriam a real opportunity to be able to experience sleep away camp in the country the same way that my son does. So we're able to be together as a family, have family time, take care of her in the way that she needs to be taken care of, but at the same time she has her independence and is integrated into a wider community."

YM-YWHA 514.737.6551: Special Needs Department: Julie Longval, ext. 235. Y Cycle: Lara Goldenberg, ext. 228. YCC SPECIAL NEEDS Family Camp: Sid Milech, ext. 262. www.ymywaha.com

YM-YWHA Special Needs Programming... This is Y.

Qi Gong Massage – An Unusually Effective Therapy for ASD



By Stephanie Winterford

Over the years, we've been introduced to countless therapies designed to help our family and my son, who has Autism, deal with the disorder more effectively. All of our

therapists have been incredible, helping us to cope with a disorder that is so ubiquitous that sometimes I forget how to interact with people who don't have to deal with special needs on a constant basis. Therapy trends evolve constantly; it can be hard to keep up. But if there's one thing that can be said

about the special needs community, it has to be that it provides its members with a network of information. And so it was that, through the Inspirations community, we were put in touch with Occupational Therapist Sophie Durocher-Noel, who introduced us to Qi Gong massage for children with Autism.

Loosely translated, Qi Gong means "working with energy". Scientific research has shown that the Qi Gong massage can substantially diminish the effects of Autism in children and young adults. To begin, we would train with Sophie in our house over a five month period and learn to give Zachary a specially designed daily massage which would target sensory issues, behavior, social and language skills, and stress at home.

Initially, I had low expectations as to the efficacy of the massage – I mean, it was a massage for heaven's sake. I was just thrilled to have another adult at my house twice a week during the summer, when no school and lack of routine generally left me feeling helpless and

exhausted. But as the Qi Gong continued, the changes were startling. Zachary's independence increased drastically: he began to dress himself, go to the bathroom alone, and he started to wash his own hair. Stress levels lowered noticeably – our summer of Qi Gong was the first summer of Zach's life where we didn't call my parents to come and help us cope. In September, Zach's teachers found the transformation remarkable, and wanted to learn more about the therapy.

Children with Autism constantly impress me with their capacity to adapt: to rules, surroundings, therapies. For Zach, Qi Gong massage was exceptional because it was the first time that a therapy had been designed to adapt to him. Two years later, we still do Qi Gong at home.

If you would like to learn more, Sophie Durocher-Noel (Occupational/Qi Gong Therapist) can be reached at sophie@massageqi-gong.com or 514-266-8196. For information visit www.massageqi-gong.com.