

# access ABILITY

Participation. Independence. Empowerment.

## INSIDE access ABILITY

The Journey to the Dance Floor  
..... 2

Got Milk?  
..... 3

Walking to the Beat of His Own Drum  
..... 4

# smd

SPRING 2010



# Ambassadors Lead Way to Success!

In 2009, SMD Foundation/Easter Seals™ Manitoba proudly introduced Allie Onslow as our Youth Ambassador. In each of our community events she displayed her enthusiasm for taking on new challenges. She conveyed the message that although disability presents challenges, it is those challenges that provide opportunities to promote accessibility and inclusion for everyone.

We appreciate Allie's commitment to SMD Foundation/Easter Seals™ Manitoba. This year Allie has once again graciously accepted the responsibility to represent our organization as the Youth Ambassador. In addition to that, SMD Foundation/Easter Seals™ Manitoba is excited to announce that Crystal Peters has agreed to become the Adult Ambassador for 2010-2011.

Since early childhood, Crystal has been involved in a variety of programs offered by SMD. She has cerebral palsy and attended Camp Arnes and Camp Manitou through SMD's Recreation and Life Skills programming. She also participated as an active member of the Independence for Youth program and the Young Adults Outings. These programs offered Crystal the opportunity to experience independent living and to gain valuable life skills such as accessing transportation, meal preparation and other household activities.

In 2004, Crystal was the recipient of the Yes I Can! technology award from the Manitoba Council for Exceptional Children. She not only received the provincial award, but travelled to New Orleans and attained international honours. She was the winner of the Yes I Can! award for art too and achieved the bronze medal for bocce, one of her favorite pastimes. Crystal also enjoys reading and writing short stories, playing with her dogs and hanging out with friends.

After graduating from Shaftesbury High School, Crystal completed her studies in the Office Skills and Technology program at Winnipeg Technical College.



Allie (left) and Crystal (right) team up to show us what ability is all about.

She made significant gains by using technology to learn, specifically a headcontrolled infrared mouse for her computer. Using this assistive technology innovation, she proficiently works as a Data Clerk at SMD's Leisure and Recreational program. It's evident by Crystal's beaming smile that she's excited about her future. "Some of my attributes that I have seen grow are my independence, confidence, and responsibility. The head-mouse has really opened up the door of opportunity for me."

In 2010, Crystal and Allie will be sharing their abilities and passion for life with the community, as Ambassadors for SMD Foundation/Easter Seals™ Manitoba.

According to Crystal "I like meeting new people and promoting the different programs that SMD has to offer. I believe in the equality of all persons; this has always been very important to me. I am so honored to be part of this program."

If you are interested in supporting our Ambassadors at one of our upcoming campaigns, please email us at [foundation@smd.mb.ca](mailto:foundation@smd.mb.ca)



# The Journey to the Dance Floor



Venturing onto a dance floor can be an experience like no other. It can move you, inspire you and fuel a huge variety of emotions ranging from simple fear to absolute joy. Just being in the presence of dance changes the way we feel. For performers and audience members alike, dance can be a powerful thing.

For a group of young men and women from the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities (SMD), dance performance had for the most part always been something enjoyed from the audience. That changed in 2009 when SMD announced an 8-week "All Abilities Dance" workshop opportunity. A group of 4 women took part in the program that challenged them to bring their own individual abilities to the dance floor.

This year, the second installment of the workshop attracted eight men and women, who like the 2009 class, will conclude the workshop with a performance at SMD Foundation/Easter Seals™ Manitoba's annual Dancing with Celebrities (DWC) Gala. The event takes place on May 1st at The Fairmont Winnipeg.

This very unique gala, now in its 4th year, features six familiar Manitobans who like the All Abilities Dance students, are new to the bright lights of the ballroom dance floor. From columnist Doug Speirs, entertainer Fred Penner and Deputy Mayor Justin Swandel, to consummate sports fan Gabe Langlois, singer-songwriter Sierra Noble and The Fairmont Winnipeg's GM Indu Brar, each of the event participants are all stepping into some new shoes, Dancing with the Stars style!

While these celebrities are each very successful and confident in their respective careers, participating in this event brings out some unfamiliar feelings. Nervous about how they will perform under the ballroom lights, the celebrities need to look no further than the All Abilities Dance group for advice on stepping out of one's comfort zone.

"I was a little nervous at first, because I've never done this before" says SMD consumer Nuno Soares about his participation in the All Abilities Dance group. At the same time, Nuno recommends approaching this experience like all other challenges in life; "There is some difficult parts to it, but like everything in life, you have to (take time) to learn".

It is here that the DWC event makes a special connection between SMD and the Manitobans that the organization serves. Disability can present many challenges in life, situations that require taking risks to achieve something new. While confidence on the dance floor is not immediate for a 'non-dancer', the right support and belief makes success possible.

Come May 1st, all of the event's participants, celebrities and non-celebrities alike, seated or standing, will come to the dance floor in the very same shoes. Together, they will share a message with gala guests- that with the right support, anything is possible. All in attendance will come to understand that it's less about how you move, and more about how the music moves you. It's about the freedom to get excited about how a song makes you feel and the freedom to be comfortable experiencing something for the very first time.

That quite simply, is dance and it is indeed changing the way we feel.



Choreographer Brenda Gorlick works with SMD's All Abilities Dance Group including CBC's Marcy Markusa and Ismaila Alfa.

The 4th Annual Dancing with Celebrities (DWC) Gala Dinner sponsored by The Gauthier Automotive Group, fills The Fairmont Winnipeg Ballroom on May 1st.

Corporate tables and individual tickets for the gala are available by calling 975-3084 or visit [www.dancingwithcelebrities.ca](http://www.dancingwithcelebrities.ca)

# Got Milk?

Last year, Joanna and Johnny Hawkins were blessed with their first bundle of joy. Little baby Ariana. They were overwhelmed with joy and curiosity. How would the birth of their daughter affect their lives?

For most parents, the biggest adjustment is dealing with a lack of sleep. For Joanna who is Deaf and Johnny who is hearing, they focused on communicating with Ariana from the moment she was born both verbally and through American Sign Language (ASL).

One would think that having a partner who can hear gives the Deaf parent the peace of mind of knowing they won't miss out on anything, such as the baby waking up in the middle of the night for a feeding.

However, when Joanna looks after Ariana independent of her hearing husband, she relies on modern technology to attend to her baby's needs. She explains there is not much difference from the technology she uses everyday in her life: to let her know when the phone rings, if someone is at the door, and what is being said on TV. "I carry around a monitor vibrator that goes off if the baby is vocalizing. The microphone hears the baby cries and the vibrator goes off. I sleep with it under my pillow so I know when the baby vocalizes I can feel the vibrations. I also utilize a wake up bed alarm which vibrates underneath our mattress."

While there are some different obstacles that a Deaf parent must adapt to, it's evident that Joanna and Johnny experience a majority of the same challenges, joys and frustrations as do all parents.

**"It's very satisfying knowing she understands and responds, but also empowering for her just to be able to have that input into her life at such a young age."**

Much like any new mother, when Joanna is home alone with Ariana, she takes her everywhere she goes...in the kitchen to cook or to do laundry. She picks up on reading her daughter's body language and is able to tune in with her baby's emotions through visual signals, seeing if she is upset, happy, sad or tired.



Baby Ariana signing "milk" at 2 months old.

Most babies with a wet diaper can only scream and hope a parent gets it. Baby Ariana and her mother can talk about it. That's because they communicate through signing. "Within a couple of months, Ariana's eyes focused and she started to recognize sign language. When she has a bowel movement I can recognize the type of smile she has by her facial expression." said Joanna.

Throughout the years, Joanna has perfected the art of reading body language and interpreting facial expressions with work as an instructor in ASL Immersion and in the Shared Reading program through SMD Services at the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities.

The benefit of exposing Ariana to ASL and verbal communication only heightens the bond that the Hawkins have with their daughter. Joanna reveals "Ariana studies you with her eyes to find out information. She loves to see the hands move and tries to analyze what they mean. Then she repeats the same movements with her own hands to try and mimic the same gestures. She gets very excited, particularly with milk," exclaims Joanna. "We do the milk sign and she either reaches for me or starts kicking her feet. It's very satisfying knowing she understands and responds, but also empowering for her just to be able to have that input into her life at such a young age."

# Walking to the Beat of His Own Drum

Would you say that you have a different way of looking at the world? David would.

David Perlmutter has Asperger Syndrome.

A relatively new disorder on the Autism Spectrum, Asperger Syndrome (AS) is classified as a neuro-developmental disorder which impacts a person's ability to engage in social interaction, communication and creating emotional connections.

With recent and formal recognition, everyday more adults are diagnosed with AS; prompting three parents in 2002 to create Asperger Manitoba Inc. (AMI).

AMI Co-founder, Bev Larmour said, "AMI was created to advocate for the supports and services for adults with AS."

Ms. Larmour said there are three core areas of Asperger Syndrome which are routinely identified by adults with AS to be challenging. They are; social skills, independent living skills and gaining long-term employment; with "social skills being the area where AS adults feel they need the most help."

Feeling there was a need, AMI recently created a pilot project to target one of the core issues. An 8-10 week group session, the pilot project was implemented to create awareness and offer opportunities for people with AS to develop their social skills, said Ms. Larmour.

## SMD Self-Help Clearinghouse has not only raised the profile of Asperger Manitoba Inc., but of the AS disorder itself.

"We are learning the process of how to interact with people and enter conversations," said David a member of the pilot project.

David was one of the first to volunteer and be involved with the pilot project. "I got involved because I wanted to meet more people with AS on a regular basis," said David. "I don't want people to look at me as a village idiot. I don't want to be on the sidelines, I want to be part of society."

Despite earning his Masters in History, David has not been able to gain long-term employment. Kristine Perlmutter, David's mother said, "People with AS are in a bind. They are quite intelligent, have skills and have a lot to offer, but their social skills get in the way."



Through the pilot project, AMI would like to develop an on-going resource centre for both those with AS and their parents.

Since early 2009, Asperger Manitoba Inc. has relied on the assistance from SMD Self-Help Clearinghouse. As a member of the Society for Manitobans with Disabilities, SMD Self-Help Clearinghouse provides AMI and 11 other organizations low cost office space, administrative support, access to meeting rooms and collaborative networking and advocacy facilitation.

SMD Self-Help Clearinghouse has not only raised the profile of Asperger Manitoba Inc., but of the AS disorder itself. "SMD has been helping us to increase awareness for AS in the general public", says Ms. Larmour.

SMD's contribution was instrumental in obtaining grants from Investors Group and The Winnipeg Foundation for the pilot project. The impact of SMD's support has already been felt by the pilot project members. David said, "sometimes I feel there is not a place for me." However after just an initial meeting with the pilot project in early March, David said, "I realized I wasn't alone."

For more information on the programs and services offered through Asperger Manitoba Inc. and the SMD Self-Help Clearinghouse, please visit [www.asperger-manitoba.ca](http://www.asperger-manitoba.ca) or [www.smd.mb.ca](http://www.smd.mb.ca)