

# EmergInfo

Fall 2010 — no 14

November 2010

## WORD FROM THE CHAIRPERSON

Dear parents,

Dear friends of Emergo,

In her excellent summary of the Emergo Executive Committee retreat, my friend Louise Riel has explained the issues that Emergo had to tackle. In a very cursory manner, how to accomplish as much as possible with limited resources.

Consequently, every year we must use our imagination and adaptability. This summer, we have accommodated more than 210 autistic children, teens or adults on both of our sites. To alleviate management issues and hold the increase of our expenses for this summer, we have transferred our group of autonomous autistics on the Bosquets site. Everyone had to give up a bit of space and compromise, but all and all we had a great summer at Emergo.

Allow me to share with you two comments heard from counselors at the end of the summer:

“From time to time, parents of autistic children are in great need of a pause, a respite. It is very hard for them to find someone reliable to take care of their child. That is what Emergo does best. Not only Emergo helps parents find this moment of respite, Emergo also offers the opportunity to autistic individuals of a change from their daily life by spending time in nature and by participating in inspiring activities.”

“Emergo is an extraordinary adventure. I have spent a wonderful summer both with great people and discovering each of my campers. Each and everyone of those campers had something unforgettable and so rewarding.»

This is the motivating factor in addressing the challenges year after year during the summer, as well as throughout the year for the school respites.

Thanks to all of our counselors and coordinators who are doing a wonderful job with very demanding customers.

Thanks to Eric and Manon who have managed to lead Emergo “de mains de maître” while Josée, our General Manager, was giving birth to little Juliette, and a big thank you to Marcelle and Ann who have supported her in her duties.

Lastly, thank you to our donors who, through their generosity, allow us to offer this vital respite and to our partners from government agencies who have been supporting us for several years now. We are counting on you to continue our mission.



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**Emergo is one great big family. It's a way to grow and learn more about ourselves by providing wellbeing to parents of autistic children.**

**A counselor—Team 2010**

## 2010-2011 BOARD OF DIRECTORS & COMMITTEES

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### COMMUNICATIONS TEAM

Manon Carle Dagenais  
Pierre Morin  
Louise Riel  
Johanne Houde

### CONCEPTION

Manon Carle Dagenais

### COLLABORATORS

Josée Barbe  
Amélie Cayouette  
Josée Filion  
Alexia Léger Moran  
Alexandre Juteau  
Louise Métivier  
Sophie Michel  
Louise Morin  
Louise Riel  
Andrée Robert

### TRANSLATION

Eric Plourde

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### AT WORK!

Tuesday, 5:30 p.m., the Communications team meets at Manon's place. As usual, the agenda is pretty loaded, but normally the meeting should end around 7:30 p.m.

We are happy to be together and we quickly get some news from each other between two bites of our meals. Then, we start the meeting. The Communications Team is also in charge of the website, of EmergInfo, the annual report, as well as the issue of all the other internal or external documents assigned by the BoD or Management.

Today, our site has become our main showcase and a privileged way to reach and inform all the people interested by the respite services offered to families of individuals with autism or coping with a PDD. Pierre, our computer expert, is responsible for the website but several people also supply some material. There you will find tons of relevant information, from the mission of Emergo to the employment forms for counselors, as well as our history, the description of our programs, our picture gallery and EmergInfo. Our site is updated regularly, but we expect a complete makeover to eventually make it more informative and user-friendly.

Next item on the agenda: EmergInfo. In this era of instant information, our newsletter is still very appreciated by all, as we can see from the many comments we have received. However, in these times of economic hardship and lack of resources, we must review our priorities. From now on, each end of November we will issue a more dynamic and more complete newsletter, looking back on last summer, presenting the guidelines for the new year and dealing with subjects of concern for our members. Also, at the beginning of June we will produce a detailed report of our activities during the fiscal year covered in the Annual Report. We hope that our readers, in particular our parent base, will be better informed this way.

Starting last year, we adopted a new format for the Annual Report to describe our activities in a more relevant and exhaustive way. Tables and statistics show the evolution of our services and our customer base. We have attached a description of our programs and a list of our major financial contributors. In a word, we have produced a more "meaningful" and thus more useful document. This is our portrait at the operational and financial levels. It is sent to all our members as well as to parents, friends, donors and financing agencies.

It's way past 9 p.m., fatigue has started to sink in and the conversation veers off. We are now four parents sitting at the table. Our children are 38, 34, 24 and 11 years old, we are pretty representative of Emergo parents. Manon and I note that even though big steps have been done with respect to autism, parents often experience the same things as before: difficulty in finding adequate resources, being judged and misunderstood by others, the unhealthy and often devastating anxiety of our children... Pierre is presently experiencing a pivotal moment of his life: his son is leaving home for a RAC. Johanne is still waiting to see which CRDI will take her young son in charge – it depends if he is in the intellectual disability or autism category! As if our children could be fitted into these nice little compartments!

All these friendly exchanges are loaded with emotion, but also great bursts of laughter. What a nice way to end the meeting.

*Louise Riel /*

*Communications Committee*

## WORD FROM THE GENERAL (INTERIM) & FINANCING MANAGER

To all of you, parents and friends of Emergo,

More than thirteen years ago today, with the help of loyal and trusted companions, I set up a temporary committee to incorporate “Camp Emergo for autistic persons.” In 1997, Emergo received its letters patent and, in 2001, changed its legal name for “Emergo Respite Services – Autism and other Pervasive Development Disorders.” Since then, Emergo has soldiered on with the help of parents determined to change it in a resource in demand able to provide for all the families knocking at our door.

Then, in 2008, I submitted a restructuring and succession plan. It was time to make way for new blood while remaining involved in philanthropic and governmental financing. Josée Filion was chosen to fill the position of General Manager. But, life being filled with unpredictable moments, Josée has become a “mom” in April 2010. Guess what? I took command again to assume the duties of “Interim General Manager” until January 2011.

I can assure you that it is a great pleasure to “serve you again” and to stay the course with such a terrific team. It has to be pointed out, I am still going to be in charge of financing, an issue that I hold dearly. Here is the summary.

The year 2009-2010 has been a particularly hard one economically speaking, the main reasons being cuts in governmental subsidies which had a tremendous impact. That year has created major insecurities and a lot of fear among organizations such as ours. However, have we been lucky or is autism more well known? For sure, the members of our Honorary Committee, parents and friends of Emergo did not “let go”, and the results speaks for themselves.

The 2010 fundraising campaign, which includes two parts – a fundraiser and a golf tournament – has reaped to this day **\$320,000!** We have exceeded our objective of \$285,000!

Thank you to Andrée Robert, chairperson of Emergo and responsible for the 2010 Financing Committee, as well as to Jacques Chartrand, honorary president of the 2010 fundraiser, for their strong commitment to support Emergo.

Thank you from the bottom of our hearts to our donors for their generosity.

Thank you for being with us in this struggle for the recognition of our needs.

Thank you for allowing us to provide an essential respite service to families coping with autism on a daily basis.

And thank you for staying with us so that we can stay the course.

The golf tournament: “My work brings me to play at several golf tournaments. The Emergo tournament, however is

the most memorable. It is entirely different from the others. It has a very human feel and the involvement of the parents is tangible.” (one of the 150 participants at our golf tournament)

Many thanks also to our players and the scores of volunteers who took part in the success of our tournament and helped us exceed our objective. We have registered a net profit of \$70,276!

Thank to our two honorary golf tournament copresidents, Michel Simard of Industries Lassonde and Claude Robert from Transport Robert, for sponsoring our golf tournament.



Charles LAFORTUNE

**Once again a big thank you to Charles Lafortune for so delightfully hosting the evening and for agreeing to come back next year!**

**Mark your schedules!**

**2011 Golf tournament**

Date: Wednesday June 15, 2011

Place: Club de golf de Saint-Jean

We **CHALLENGE** you for next year: sell all 36 foursomes. We are counting on you!!! All are welcome to play or maybe just for the supper and the auction. We are expecting you!



In conclusion, do you know anyone who would be interested to work with us on the Financing Committee or the Golf Tournament Organizing Committee? We will welcome them with arms open! It's for a good cause!

*Maxime Carle Lafortune*

## MOM, WHEN DO I GO BACK TO CAMP EMERGO?

### HONORARY COMMITTEE 2010

Jacques Chartrand,

Gestion de portefeuille Selexia

Sylvie Cataford Blais, Galerie Simon Blais

Roger Carle, Bombardier Inc.

Jennifer Damiani, Brasserie Labatt

Steven Foley, Financière Banque nationale

Patrick Gagnon, GMP

Claude Lockhead, Aon Conseil

Josée Massicotte, jmcommunications



Thank You

## CAMP EMERGO IS ALSO FOR AUTISTIC GROWN-UPS!

Our organization offers first and foremost respite services, hence its name. But it also has a very important role to play: allowing autistic individuals to experience thrilling vacations with joyful, dynamic and caring youngsters.

When these individuals leave the family environment, they still need to need to have such experiments. Because you see, autistic individuals tend to isolate themselves; it's not that they dislike affection or social life, but rather they ignore how to relate with these two things. In an environment like camp Emergo, with energetic young counselors who were trained adequately, who express affection and readily accept their difference, autistic individuals are happy and experiment with human

feelings they are entitled to have like everybody else, and that they are badly in need of. I know what I am talking about, since I was diagnosed with autism.

I wonder if Emergo should review its eligibility criteria; at present, an autistic individual who does not live in a family environment does not have the right to stay at camp Emergo, except for some who have an acquired right because they have been coming to camp for a period of time before January 19, 2005; but those individuals with an acquired right cannot be in the group iDÉFIx... The idea behind these criteria is to give as many respites as possible to the families (although conservation of acquired rights" can seem incoherent...). Is the ineligibility to the

"acquired right" for the people in the group iDÉFIx justified only by financial reasons? I heard that it is even more complicated than that: lack of space and reliable counselors... Hmm... But, in my opinion, individuals that no longer live in their family environment, iDÉFIx or not, also need – they have more need, even – to go to camp Emergo, since they do not benefit from the emotional input of a family.

I think that, basically, the decision to lower the eligibility of individuals no longer living in their family environment as well as reducing the duration of camp stays, stem from the wish to provide respite to the greatest number of families. This is very commendable, but Emergo cannot grow indefinitely and whatever is done,

the waiting list will just keep getting bigger. Emergo must take care of those it claims it takes care of; it cannot meet everyone's needs. Other organizations may be created by the families and several autistic individuals that Emergo will unfortunately be unable to care for...

Thank you.

*Pierre Morin,*



## HAPPINESS TO SHARE

### MANY THANKS AGAIN,

Hello,

We are fully rested and most of all we did some activities that we were or are not able to do with the kids and this has been a major source of help and relief for us, knowing that all was well with the kids at the camp.

We have appreciated this respite even more because we know that children are in great need of socializing, experiencing life outside of home and seeing how other people than their parents are living; we believe they learned how to socialize thanks to you. (We have no family in Quebec and only one friend, which makes for a quite small network of acquaintances.) Social abilities services offered at the local Intellectual Disability Rehabilitation Centre (CRDI) are still not available and the selection process is quite strict (no difficult behavior, no major crisis, good interaction with others, etc.). That is why we are putting all our hopes on your association, to make sure that our children make progress in their socialization skills.

Regards,

*Sophie Michel*

### NEW FRIEND AT EMERGO

Dear camp Emergo,

I really appreciated and seriously liked my visit at the camp. I realized that I should have tried this several summers ago. I really liked the counselors and the other friends in my group.

I did not really expect such a nice surprise and it made me really happy. In the group, there was my childhood friend I had met in the Outaouais region and he was such a good friend! His name is Mathieu. We talked a lot, we had a lot of things to talk about, we had not seen each other for 7 years!

After all this, I spent a truly wonderful day and I want to come back next summer, because it was too much fun!!!

I love you very much... *Alexandre Juteau*

### MANY THANKS FOR A SUPER HOLIDAY

Hello to all of you,

Back to school time is a sure sign that summer is coming to an end. And what a summer that was! Not only the weather was amazing, it was one of the best camps ever for Julien. Convinced he would not like his stay, Julien had announced to all that it was his very last year at Camp Mariste. The magic of the camp, the counselors, and Service Emergo quickly made him change his mind. Our Julien came back to us very happy, more mature and convinced that there was a place for him at Camp Mariste with Service Emergo.

A big thanks to all of you for this very nice stay.

See you next summer!

*Louise Métivier*, Julien's mother

### 2010 SUMMER TEAM'S TESTIMONIALS

« Each person has its own attributes and Emergo provides to all the opportunity to do the extra mile and offer the best moments possible to its campers... In short, at Emergo there is something unique which drives us to try and make people happy! »

“The best school I have been to up until now, the place that made me grow in more ways than one at very different times in my life, an essential gesture of selflessness to help parents, or a family, in need.”

“An incredible life experience where I had the chance to transcend psychological and physical limitations.”

“This is the ideal setting to gain experience and beautiful memories.”



## EMERGO: A DREAM COME TRUE!

Is there something more gut-wrenching for a mother than hearing her child say: “No, I don’t want to be away from you! I don’t want to go to camp... I miss you too much there! I’m afraid you’ll have an accident... I’m afraid to lose you.” How many times and for how long I had to tell my daughter: « Nothing is going to happen to me... I will also take some vacations... We will be happy to see each other when I come back. You’re going to make some friends at the camp... You will have tons of activities to ... It’s going to be fun in the countryside...” How do I find reassuring arguments for this visceral fear of not being able to see her mom anymore? Especially when one is a single mother and the father is less available. The bond is even more symbiotic/exclusive, whether we like it or not. I always thought my daughter’s fears would subside as time passed by. I thought that, by being reunited with her mom after each stay at the summer camp, she would gain confidence by herself. But I have to admit that nothing like this has happened seamlessly over time. From the first weekend respites, when she was about 12, up to her next-to-last camp when she was 19, it was always the same old song; the same story over and over.

So I gave up entirely and my spouse suggested that she spent her vacations with us. Alexia has thus traveled with us for two consecutive years. It was often enjoyable, while being also very demanding since we were always together.

Let’s not forget also that Alexia has had very difficult moments these last two years. She went through a long bout of depression (that seemed endless to us). One could say that this was some kind of “existential crisis.” At 22 years old, despite the difficulties inherent to the Asperger’s syndrome she is suffering from, Alexia has this desire to be autonomous and yearn for a freedom that is genuine. So, after that intense period, she and I felt the need for more distance so that she could gain a bit more independence while I would get much needed respite. We both agreed on the fact that she should try and spend more time away from me. This is why I insisted that she registered again at camp Emergo.

On July 9 last summer, Alexia came for a stay at the camp with a few hesitations and a good dose of unwillingness. Despite her good intentions, she watched me leave with tears in her eyes. I could not help feeling a twinge of sadness, even if I knew it was for the better...

for her... and for me.

To my biggest surprise, what happened on the day I decided to pick her up?

Upon my arrival, instead of a young girl happy to see me and anxious to go back home, I met a sad and worried Alexia. She was half-smiling, but we could clearly see how she was sad to leave her new friends at camp Emergo.

The long-awaited miracle had happened... finally! Alexia had lost her childhood « ennui » and in its place a desire to create deep friendship bonds arose. So, on that day, leaving her new friends made her sad and nostalgic.

This is a wonderful gift for Alexia, as well as for me. You cured her from her “seesickness”!

Thank you... Thank you to all the counselors of Emergo. Each and everyone of you, in your own way, has allowed for “Un rêve à réaliser” (A dream to fulfill) to become “Un rêve devenu réalité” (A dream come true)...

Alexia is still working on her autonomy and she is becoming better every day. I am very proud of her and share with her my joy of seeing her blossom.

Looking forward to seeing you again next summer.

*Michelle Léger*

(a more relaxed mother)



## EMERGO THE ENCHANTER

What an unforgettable day! Alex was so happy that I could not believe my eyes. I was thrilled.

First, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Louise A Morin and I am a good friend of Alex's mom. While I was writing the government decisions regarding autism, my friend was told that Alex was affected by Asperger's syndrome. I was devastated. Alex is now a handsome young man aged 19.

Let us go back to August 12. Alex and I went to visit camp *Les Bosquets*, operated by *Les Services de répit Émergo*, and located at Mont St. Hilaire, to check if Alex could join the camp next summer.

Right after we arrived, doors stood wide open, our dear Manon waiting for us. Manon, (that I affectionately call grandma, because she is both a mother and grandmother of these respite services), then introduced us to this very nice environment as well as to the personnel.

Our welcome was as warm as the day was sunny and magnificent.

Alex met the counselors responsible for his age group and quickly joined in the first game of charades. The activities went on all day and Alex had the great pleasure to play Kik ball, to participate in a race of jumping sack, and enjoy the inflatable games. Oh, and also to reconnect with a childhood friend. Such joy! There was no end to the chitchat. This reunion was quite heartwarming. Alex was so happy with his day that he wished he had stayed for supper.

A special lunch was waiting for us, because the personnel had been busy preparing meals outside on a bonfire. Alex ate 3 hot dogs, cake, candies, etc. while easily mingling with the group!

Manon introduced me to many people who are part of the personnel and we went to visit the camp. I noticed that the twinning of groups according to the age or the needs of children or young adults are an important concern for the personnel. Each children gets special attention. I was very happy to observe, for example, that the counselors were quite concerned with Alex's intestinal problems and have focused all the necessary attention, after I had explained that problem to them.

I also appreciated the goals set for by the group Alex was part of. It is a group of friends who meet during their vacations and must perform household chores like

doing the laundry, cooking... well, let us forget tidying up the room, though, these are teens after all!

I also noticed that a timetable is posted on the wall to organize the activities. The kids know how their day will unfold: a nap after lunch, a predetermined bedtime, etc. It is very important to be able to anticipate these different periods.

I have seen the level of care of counselors towards the children. The enthusiasm was mandatory, while the needs of each and everyone was being taken care of. Living in team and socialization are developed through the practice of various activities, including sports-oriented or mind games. Periods of relaxation also favor concentration. And each seemed to be well positioned in his role whether they were responsible for small children, adolescents or young adults.

Whether the needs of autistic individuals are intense or less intense, the response to those needs seemed to me very adequate. The abilities of the personnel also seemed appropriate for the needs of the children.

Lastly, the site, because of the generosity of the surrounding nature, is exceptional and sufficiently large to allow each individual his own personal space.

I am grateful for the existence of Emergo thanks to the contribution from so many parents and professionals. Thank you Mom Emergo for letting us experience this wonderful day.

The light of joy was shining in the eyes of Alex the Enchanted!

This smells like serene spirit...

*Louise A Morin*



# 2010 Emergo's Team

## EMERGO IN ACTIVITIES

There's much to see around here!



So much fun with water



and reptiles!



Emergo gets around! Long live Gatineau!



# 2010 GOLF TOURNAMENT Club de golf de Saint-Jean

A-golfing we will go!

Everybody pitches in for a good cause! Many thanks to our volunteers!



Charles Lafortune, our friend and honorary sponsor



Practice makes perfect..fun!



Michel Simard (Les Industries Lasseonde) et  
Claude Robert (Transport Robert), honorary copresidents

Jacques Chartrand, honorary president

2010 Fundraising Campaign

Andrée Robert, chairperson—Emergo 2010

Sylvie et Patrick Gagnon, loyal friends of Emergo



Josée Barbe, mother, speaks of her experience

## TO BECOME A MOM

I started writing this article more than three weeks ago. Everything was already pretty clear: I only needed to set down my ideas on paper! However, I am unable to give it THE one small touch it needs to give it the shape I wish. And then, for the last three weeks, I have been replacing some words, changing the meaning of some sentences, reading and rereading my article... but it's no use! I am still not convinced, still dissatisfied with the result!

Then, I start writing a new article. This time, I sit my beautiful Juliette besides me. She casts cute smiles at me while trying to have a "conversation"! What can be more inspiring than maternity?

To become a mom is undoubtedly the most extraordinary experience I have ever lived! There is no question about it: having a child can change your life, but most of all we change! I have a different outlook on my surroundings now, I reset my priorities, I discover aspects of my personality that I didn't even know the existence of and I go through life with new reference points.

Since the birth of Juliette, I feel like I got my inner child back! Everything seems prettier, funnier, more real! I am rediscovering my creativity, revisiting imaginary worlds and recalling the nursery rhymes and the games I played in my childhood. To love, rock, cuddle, smooch, tickle, play, sing, entertain, reassure, soothe, nurse and comfort are the verbs I conjugate on a daily basis.

In five months, I learned baby lan-

guage, I became an expert in decoding cries, I learned to do almost everything with one hand and I memorized hundreds of tips and tricks! I also learned to change tears into laughter, an ordinary stroll in a fascinating adventure, driving away night terrors, clean any stain caused by regurgitated milk and, especially, be quicker than my own shadow! But I am still unable to move without causing the floor to creak, nor am I able to tolerate the mess growing around my house!

When I became a mom, I realized that I did not quite know what to expect! My aunt had told me: "The important thing is, you will love that child and you will do your best whatever the circumstance." She was quite right. Impossible for me to know and predict everything! To be a parent is a new challenge every day. My greatest happiness is without a doubt taking up the challenge with my sweet Juliette who, in her own personal way, tells me if I'm doing right or not! With her, there is no filter: everything is honest and straightforward!

When people ask me how does it feel to be a mom, I have trouble finding the words to describe that. To be a mother, it's giving endlessly, it's opening your heart and your arms as wide as the universe, it's being afraid, it's being in awe with everything your child does, it's asking yourself thousands of questions, it's feeling submerged my love, it's sometimes doing too much, it's being move at any given moment, it's to ignore fatigue, it's accepting to share what we hold dear with others, it's remaining humble, it's wanting to live each moment... So, what does it mean to be a mom? It feels good! I cherish every instant spent with my daughter, I en-

joy every single crazy moment and I try to keep as much memories as possible!

Before Life sent me this little angel, I did not know that my heart could give this much love! Now I understand that the love of a parent for their child is unconditional and endless!

*Josée Fillion*



Breaking News  
minute SURPRISE!!

Juliette will have a little sister or brother in April

## THE TIME OF FOUR SUMMERS

Spending one summer at Camp Emergo, it's a lot of things. You come back for many reasons. Then you can't live without it. Every school year, every hardship, every bad patch, every disappointment is always offset by memories of a summer spent at Camp Mariste, with hundreds of children. That is something one can hold onto.

Camps can change your life. As for me, my Emergo adventure began at 18, very young, not very mature, excited, enthusiastic and gossipy. During that very first summer, it's an understatement, but many aspects of my life took quite a different turn. I discovered a type of customer that I found impressive, fascinating and, captivating.

For me, it was necessary to come back for another summer. I would have missed those people too much. The relationship that binds counselors and monitors just boggles the mind. The intensity of a camp, of living in community for several weeks inevitably gets people closer together. And the children... How can I put this; they literally transform an ordinary day in a unpredictable journey, sometimes ridicule and yet so fascinating. Their retorts, their charm, their craziness, their obsessions, their fears and their paroles astonish every counselor. And life at the camp. We always get something out of it. Friends 24 hours a day. A camp cot for 7 weeks. Not very healthy food. A lake. A microclimate. The in-

tensity of all these emotions. Time goes by so slow yet so fast.

Now, 4 years later, this wonderful journey comes to an end. My life has been changed completely. I now study in School and Social Adaptation. Without Emergo, without these kids, I would be nothing. Now I have a passion for what I do.

Lastly, I think that it is after hearing the story of a very strong and incredible mom that I can understand why I did this for four years, why I dedicated so much love and energy. During our pre-camp, we had the chance to listen to a very moving story from a mother of two wonderful autistic children. Her very touching words allowed me to understand and corroborate the reasons behind my career and my job choices for the last 4 summers.

We change lives, you change lives. The lives of tired mommies and daddies. And that is worth all the riches of the world. Well done.

*Amélie Cayouette*

2007-2010

## OUR 2010 SUMMER TEAM AND THEIR PERCEPTION OF EMERGO

"I would say that it is an outstanding organization that tries to help parents of autistic children as much as possible and that the happiness of their child is something very dear to us."

"Emergo is more than a mere vacation camp. The organization gives the opportunity for each autistic child, according to his personality, to grow while being supervised by caring and dedicated counselors. Emergo is a place that campers seem to really enjoy and where the employees have a passion for their work. We want to give parents the chance to rest during that respite so that they do not have to worry if their child will be safe... he will be!"

"A vacation camp where one of the main priorities is the autonomy of the individual. We are present for that individual, to play with him and have him discover many things while taking his abilities into account."

"From time to time, parents of autistic children really need a pause, a respite. However, it is very difficult for them to find someone reliable to take care of their child. This is where Emergo comes in. Not only does Emergo provide the parents with that respite, it also provides to autistic individuals the opportunity to move out of their ordinary by experiencing nature and doing exciting activities."

"Emergo is a way to learn the reality of parents of autistic children; it allows us to find out that, even if a child is different, it is possible to experience unforgettable moments with him."

"It's another world where everything evolves, changes and takes on another value. It's a reality that forces us to change our perspective on the world and on others, on the concepts of normality and happiness. It's a place where the challenges are both from within and from without, on quite a range of aspects."

## RETREAT FOR THE BOARD MEMBERS OF EMERGO

On a nice Sunday morning, last February, the Board members met to ponder on the major issues affecting Emergo in four specific sectors: clientele, programs, financial resources and operational structure. Our short-term goal was to establish priorities for our 2012-2017 Strategic Plan and, ultimately, ensure the permanence of our organization.

Christian Watier, who knows our organization quite well and who deeply wishes to further its mission, led with great skill our heated discussions. We did not change the definition of our mission, established in 2007. Instead, we recognized a dual role: offering respite services to parents of autistic children in great need of those services, by welcoming in a secure, warm and structured environment children, teens and adults with autism for whom resources of this type are uncommon or even non-existent.

Now, how can we do this with limited resources in terms of personnel, funding and space? "That is the question!" as Shakespeare would say. We tried to reach a balance in compassion, fairness and common sense, but we agreed on the fact that, by reducing services to our actual members in order to welcome new parents knocking at our door, we meet the needs of no one. We have to do well what we have to do before trying to do more. However, let us hope we will eventually be able to free up new places because more and more families are living with an autistic child (sometimes even more than one) and are in crucial need of respite.

We reflected upon our programming. The decision to transfer to Les Bosquets our group of autonomous participants aimed at streamlining our operations and focusing on our services while increasing the number of interesting activities thanks to the proximity of Montreal. However, it is quite obvious that we have thus moved away from the initial project, which was allowing these participants to live in a more normalizing environment. The 2010 Summer Respite Report will allow us to assess the relevance of our decision.

We discussed the minimum duration of stays in order that they represent a real respite for parents. We pondered on the needs of our customers (parents and children). We agreed on the fact that Emergo is a resource quite unlike any other: we provide a personalized approach with specialized service. But we also agreed to review some aspects of our programs and our policy of accessibility to services, to better meet the needs.

Money is the key here. Even if the 2010-2011 budget was drawn with the greatest care for forecast and caution, we looked for ways to reduce our expenses and increase our revenues to address the numerous cost increases, especially since the rise of minimum wage. We explored various possibilities including rate setting, since State funding has virtually not increased since 2004. Thankfully, Emergo can count on an extremely efficient and dedicated Honorary Committee!

Even though time was flying and fatigue was sinking in, we also talked about the important issue of our operational structure. Josée having to leave us soon in preparation for the arrival of little Juliette, we had to set the interim with the maximum transparency possible for our members. Manon has accepted to take back the reins temporarily and to team up with Éric to ensure continuity. This year, though, we had a major challenge: the majority of our former counselors were leaving us and the work to revitalize the team was colossal and demanding.

The employee turnover is costly for Emergo because we have to train all the newcomers and recreate the team spirit. We tried out various tools to promote the hiring and the retention of our employees. According to studies on the subject, gratitude ranks 1<sup>st</sup> whereas salaries only ranks 7<sup>th</sup>. This is good news, because our flexibility is very low in terms of pay raises, though we have a little bit more clout on the other factors (feeling of contribution, working conditions, vertical relationships, accountability, etc.).

Our organization is also based on a Board of Directors that needs to be strong and responsible. We thus reexamined the role of each BoD committee and deemed relevant to restore the Committee on the aging of our clientele, since the phenomenon affects the whole society and already represents a big challenge for Emergo.

This day has turned out to be one of the powerful moments in the life of the 2009-2010 BoD. The program was ambitious, but I believe we succeeded in making major progress during our retreat. If sometimes we are taken aback by the sheer magnitude of the challenges, an exercise such as this one allows us to foresee solutions within our reach and rekindle our energies while strengthening the bonds between BoD members.

It is with great enthusiasm that we now begin the 2010-2011 period. I wish all of you a great year!

*Louise Riel*





## EMERGO'S MISSION

To offer respite services to families living with autistic people or people having pervasive developmental disorders by welcoming them in a safe and stimulating outdoor environment adapted to their needs, thus encouraging them to maintain and develop their capabilities

## THE VALUES

To carry out its mission, to guide the decision-making, and to reach the objectives defined in its strategic plan, Emergo relies on the following values:

**Customer Satisfaction** – Emergo has the concern and the will to answer fairly, within the limits of its resources, to the families of autistic persons' need for respite by using its motto as an inspiration "Parents helping parents".

**Respect** – Emergo respects differences and adopts a caring and individualized approach when giving its services to families and managing its personnel.

**Pursuit of Excellence** – Emergo does the utmost with the available resources by encouraging its personnel and its collaborators to show creativity, initiative and responsibility in order to take up the challenges and to offer exceptional respite services.

**Transparency** – Emergo relies on open communication, clear operation rules known by all, collegial and documented decision-making to ensure the good functioning of the organization.

**Integrity** – Emergo manages the entrusted funds with honesty, probity and rigor, and treats each one with the greatest equity.

**Loyalty** – Emergo expects its personnel to perform its duties in the interest of the organization and the families of autistic persons, and to behave at all times in a way that supports its good reputation.

**Privacy** – Emergo ensures families, participants, members of its personnel, collaborators and benefactors the respect and the protection of their privacy and their personal information.

**Strategic Plan 2007-2012**

## MY DREAM — BEING A MOTHER



My big dream of being a mother came true around the age of 32, when I gave birth, easily and naturally, to a beautiful boy, but my dream quickly turned out quite different!

Daily life with my son Elliott was infernal: crying (18 hours a day for 13 months), vomiting and almost no sleep, but I was convinced this would not last and

that life would be back to normal. Rather, it was the hospital visits that took a toll on my life... to get my first appointment with a medical team, and help me understand what was wrong with Elliott; when they asked me why I needed an appointment, I wrote: *to be happy again!* I managed to get that appointment one week later!

The long diagnostic process took 5 years with the specialists as best friends! The acronym PDD entered the life of Elliott at the age of five, and that is still his diagnosis... since then however, other words added themselves: scoliosis, hypotonicity, attention disorder, intellectual disability, severe learning disability...

On the day of the diagnosis, I phoned all my friends to tell them to forget about me! I was sure I would not be able to deal with reality, so I stayed in my room for three days! But Elliott needed me! I dedicated my time and energy to him, and then my longing to be a mother took a whole new meaning!

During the Elliott adventure, I got pregnant! Elliott was only 3 years old! I knew very well I couldn't take care of another child but the circumstances and life's little ironies...

Little Édouard would be born some time later, a smiling and independent child, I tell myself that I have less time for him and that he is able to do so much by himself.

It took me some time to develop the unconditional love I have for him, but I understand so much why. I was deeply buried in a **great sorrow**, and especially an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness... accepting the harsh reality of life.

At that time, I nevertheless considered myself very fortunate to experience two sides of life... the learning difficulties of Elliott combined with the easiness of Édouard... I appreciated all the little things and nothing was taken for granted. I think that in general, people take the life and the health of their child as an acquired right. It's rather a matter of luck, in my own opinion!

After we moved, Édouard started to have tantrums and the PDD diagnostic fell. Him too, around the age of 5, and the whole Ste-Justine hospital shook from my screams of pain!

It's impossible! Someone made a mistake! I won't be able to do it, two autistic children for one mom, it's impossible!

How do I define my role? I am not God! This is an emotional overload of incredible violence.

But how does one grieve with two children very much in need around. I wrapped up my rage, my anger and my sorrow and then went on with my life... I was afraid to cry, afraid to cry and never be able to stop crying, because the effort needed for comforting is too great and those efforts must go to the handicapped children.

During those years, I worked hard with my kids, breaking down those walls, wanting what's best for them, but sadness had taken so much space in my heart. And I couldn't help compare my situation with other parents and I envied those parents of healthy children. I was living in a dark world, full of sadness, unable to live in harmony with my kids... too much grief... too much grief! Unable to think, to stop and breathe.

Last year, life had another surprise in store for me: I was diagnosed with breast cancer!

The night after I learned the diagnosis, when I went to tuck my boys in, I was not afraid I would not see my **autistic** children anymore, I was afraid I would not see my boys, period!

All the sorrow and despair around the word handicapped vanished at that very instant. I understood that I had two wonderful kids with an incredible courage. I realized that my kids were strong and never again I would doubt their abilities.

## MY DREAM - BEING A MOTHER(2)

Now I have confidence in my children and I am no longer blinded by their differences. I believe in life, I don't want to ever forget how powerful my children are. They deserve a positive and happy mother, it is that strength that helped send them on vacation at camp **Emergo!**

**Emergo** has allowed me to pause, to catch my breath and go on with my life with more stability involved.

Thank you, **Emergo!**

Today I am able to understand my needs better, and take some time for myself, live happy and be there for my children since they are full-fledged human beings and that, even when they are far away from me, they are **ABLE** to do everything...

I thank life for making me understand that I have two kids who live in a world that is parallel to mine. But whoever said that we must all be the same?

Who ever taught us that life is only performance and conformity? Is life not made for us to be happy?

I salute the courage of all autistic children.

I wish to thank Mr. Beaulieu and his family, Amélie and all the care givers at **Emergo**... for making a place for us in the big family of **Emergo**.

You have all my appreciation!

*Josée Barbe*

mother of Eliott and Édouard Barrette



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## LETTER FROM ALEXIA TO HER COUNSELORS

(Bixi, Maya, Playa et Mouette), her counselor (Smash) et Banzaï...

Été 2010

Hello gang,

I must admit that in the beginning I was not too keen on going to camp, because ever since my childhood, I never liked this kind of thing. But I was pleasantly surprised. My counselors (Bixi, Maya, Playa, Mouette and Smash) were angels, and so was Banzaï, the head of the counselors. I liked *all of them*. What's more, I had the chance to discover "Gaston LaGaffe", my newfound interest, even though I thought nothing would ever interest me since I stopped obsessing over "Roxy" (a T.V. series with stand-up comic Cathy Gauthier). Now, though, I don't know if I have the same interest for Gaston than before... and sometimes that makes me cry.

I send you a very big kiss and all my love!

I often think about you.

*Alexia C. Léger-Moran*

## Emergo Respite Services & Other P.D.D.s

*Parents helping parents*



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[WWW.SERVICESDEREPITEMERGO.COM](http://WWW.SERVICESDEREPITEMERGO.COM)

### Who are we?

Emergo is a non-profit organization founded in 1976 by parents of autistic children with the desire to help other parents like them by offering respite services. This is how the first camp able to receive autistic people in Quebec was born.

### What is our mission?

To offer respite services to families living with autistic people or people having pervasive developmental disorders by welcoming them in a safe and stimulating outdoor environment adapted to their needs, thus encouraging them to maintain and develop their capabilities

### I love going to Emergo!

When Jean-Francois yells out: "I love going to Emergo!", his parents know that they can fully enjoy their few days of freedom, because their child is happy at Emergo.

### Who can become a member?

In addition to families living with autistic people or people with a pervasive developmental disorder, Emergo welcomes among its members any person, parent, friend, professional, intervener, or organization interested in autism and its repercussions on family, entourage and society.



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### DEADLINE

We invite you to send your texts and comments.

All texts are submitted to the approval of our editing team, who reserves the right to shorten them if needed. The authors are entirely responsible for their writings. They do not compromise in any way Emergo Respite Services—Autisme & other P.D.D.

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