

MEET YOUR NEIGHBOURS

'Enfant Soleil' pays it forward

By Matthew McCully

Everyone has a story to tell. On Friday afternoon, there were probably a few hundred shoppers that passed through the Walmart in Cowansville. On their way through the door they may have seen a young man holding out a container, asking for donations.

That was Matthew Gibson.

He had the day off school from Massey-Vanier High School, so he decided to volunteer to gather donations at an Opération Enfant Soleil fundraiser.

Matthew has been an ambassador for the non-profit organization ever since 2015 when he was chosen to be the official Enfant Soleil representative for the Monteregie region.

Even though he completed his year, Matthew has remained involved with Enfant Soleil and its umbrella group, the Children's Miracle Network, to share his story of determination with peers and encourage support for the foundation, which raises money for pediatric care.

When he was around 12-years-old, Matthew didn't feel well. He had chronic

stomach pain and was often tired and lethargic.

At first, his family doctor couldn't pinpoint any visible symptoms, but upon further testing, Matthew received a diagnosis of Crohn's disease.

"The best way I could illustrate it is you know when you have a cancer sore?" Matthew said. "You can tolerate it, but it's annoying," he said, pointing out that there is a sharp reminder it's there every time you eat.

"I had about 20 centimetres of cancer sores in my intestines," he explained.

While Crohn's can be managed with medication, Matthew's doctor recommended that he avoid aggressive treatment with hard drugs that had major side effects.

The alternative was several three to four month stints over a four-year period where Matthew couldn't eat at all. He had to endure a liquid diet through a feeding tube.

"It was to kind of give my intestines a break," he said. "It was like a big protein shake, but it didn't taste good at all."

Thanks to a machine provided by En-

fant Soleil, Matthew was able to use the feeding tube at home rather than be hospitalized. He was fed up to 3,000 calories per night, he said, and also had to do feedings during the day.

Matthew said he used to binge watch Storage Wars, his favourite show at the time, while being fed.

At 12-years-old, Matthew said he weighed around 60 lbs.

Now 17, he is around 135lbs, and close to six feet tall.

His 20 centimetres of excruciating intestinal pain is down to four centimetres, making Matthew the patient with the best results from the treatment regimen, according to his doctors.

Matthew credits his recovery to a positive attitude and a strong family support network.

"I didn't get discouraged," Matthew said. Because his parents noticed he had a competitive spirit, they told him, "This is just a challenge in life that you need to go through."

"I know there are many people worse off than me," Matthew said, which is the reason he stays involved with Enfant Soleil and the Children's Miracle Network, to pay his positive attitude forward.

Matthew recently had the opportunity to travel to Ottawa as one of the Quebec representatives for the Children's Miracle Network.

He had the chance to meet with other families from the network with children battling sickness and exchange stories.

"I met one little kid from Newfoundland with a feeding tube," Matthew said. Not wanting him to feel discouraged, Matthew told him, "Hey, I went through that for four years, but look at me now."

As an ambassador for the non-profit organization, Matthew also got to meet Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, play twister with super heroes, skate with



MATTHEW MCCULLY

Matthew Gibson collecting donations for Opération Enfant Soleil, as ambassador for the non-profit organization.

some pro hockey players, and even hang out with Miss America and Miss Teen U.S.A. during a recent trip to Orlando.

"I'm really grateful," Matthew said, for the recovery he has had thanks to the support he received from Enfant Soleil.

"They definitely have an impact on families," he said.

Matthew finishes high school this year, and then intends to study pure and applied sciences at Cégep de Granby next year.

While he has no set schedule, he said he will continue, whenever possible, to volunteer his time to share his story and encourage kids to stay strong and positive in the face of adversity, and continue to help fundraise for Enfant Soleil to help the organization that helped him.



DAPHNÉ STAPLES

Matthew pictured with his family and the Prime Minister.

Potton proudly presents a team of youth with babysitting training



THE SCOOP

MABLE HASTINGS

On Saturday, May 20 certified Red Cross instructor Marta Gubert Gomes welcomed thirteen youth who took part in the Canadian Red Cross Babysitting course in Mansonville.

Organized by the Missisquoi North Volunteer Youth Centre's Sarah Jersey, the training was a big success. The course covered everything from managing difficult behaviours to essential content on leadership and professional conduct as a babysitter. Babysitting

deepens and enhances the responsibility that older youth feel when caring for younger children and give the appropriate care in the event of an emergency.

The duration of the 7-8 hour course designed for youth 11 years and up, was held from 8:30am to 4pm at the Mansonville Town Hall and included a visit to the Youth Centre during the lunch break. With six boys and seven girls, the group was diverse and interesting. The cost per youth was \$65.00 and included the manual.

"I had a great group today," shared instructor Marta Gubert Gomes at the end of the day. "The group was impressive and I believe they learned a lot."

Marta treated the group to a pizza lunch which was a real treat for the kids. The course was bilingual and the material covered was presented in both languages.

The course filled up quickly and a list of participants for another session has already been compiled. The next session will likely take place in November. The youth who took part were all smiles as



COURTESY

The team of thirteen youth who participated in Potton's first Canadian Red Cross Babysitting course this past weekend. The next session is expected to take place in November.

they posed for a group photo outside the Youth Centre during their visit. If the enthusiasm is any indication, Potton

children will be in good hands as these youth put their skills learned to practice.