



How a Halifax mom helped her family and hundreds of others — and how you can too

April 13, 2015 By Charmaine Dymond 1 Comment



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For many parents with new babies, the focus is on the basics: eating, sleeping and (if you're lucky) showering. Not so for Alice Evans. When her youngest son, Alfie, was only six months old, she started work on creating what would become **The Club**, an organization that offers recreational and social opportunities to people with disabilities. Her motivation? Alfie has Down syndrome.

It was 2007 and Alice had recently moved to Halifax from London, England with her family: husband Matthew, and sons Noah and Alfie. Alice and Matthew were happy with the support Alfie was receiving at the time, but were worried about what his life would be like when he was older.

“Often people find that once kids hit 13 they are more excluded – not on purpose – but not invited to parties, left out more socially. The differences between kids with intellectual disabilities and without become more marked at that age,” Alice says.

After talking to other families, Alice realized their concern was spot-on. She teamed up with Renee Pye, a local mom with a teenage son who has special needs.

“We were looking for a way for people to connect and have those opportunities and choices that we all like to have in our lives, and we came up with The Club,” Alice says.

Alice and Renee started with three pilot programs – a theatre club, a dance club and a cooking club. In 2010, The Club found a permanent home at St James Anglican Church in Halifax, and has been offering programs and activities nearly every day for four years now. They added programs in Dartmouth and Bedford in 2013.

The Club is open to anyone who wants to be a part of it – and there’s a lot to be a part of. [The Drop In Club](#), open every day but Saturday, is a gathering place full of social activities, such as playing games, crafting, watching movies, and simply hanging out and making friends. The Drop In is complemented by a number of [other programs](#) (often called ‘clubs’), such as music, walking, writing, and cooking, and special events such as a winter ball, summer camp and a fashion show.

Max Cook, a therapeutic recreation student at Dalhousie, has been volunteering at The Club since September. “I get a smile on my face pretty much as soon as I walk in the door,” he says. “It’s been way more rewarding than I thought it’d be.”

He helps out at Tuesday evening’s Drop In Club. “There’s usually a main activity and that’s supplemented by smaller activities surrounding that. When I get there I set up the arts and crafts table. It’s usually a good gathering place for the first 15 to 20 minutes. People come in and draw or colour and we talk, we hang out,” Max says.

Jackie Rivers, Program Officer at The Club, says that they rely on volunteers to make The Club what it is. “Many of them not only help with the day to day prep and activities but really make lasting relationships with the members. They come with great ideas and bring a lot of energy to the space,” she says.

The Club is always on the lookout for [new volunteers](#). “Our volunteers find it’s lovely to go somewhere where people really care about them,” Alice says. “It’s a really unique volunteering experience that can make a difference in our volunteers’ lives, as well as our members.”

Regular Drop In Club volunteers, like Max, help to facilitate activities and hang out with members. You might find yourself playing cards, dancing, or joining in karaoke.

“Every night there’s something I can easily relate to. Even the dancing,” laughs Max. “Usually I can

get into most activities pretty easily. They cater to a whole variety of personal interests.”

If you’d like to help but can’t manage a regular commitment, you could be a ‘One Hit Wonder’. This is a chance to come to Drop In Club to lead a workshop – a gardening one last year was popular – or to simply share something, à la show and tell. “I went in and shared my holiday photos!” says Alice. “It’s about meeting people, being part of a community.”

If all that sounds far too social for your liking, there are also behind-the-scenes opportunities. Volunteers are needed to help with setting up activities, making snacks with members, cleaning, and collecting auction items for The Club’s annual fundraiser, Blingo.

Alice explains that you don’t need to have experience working with people with special needs to volunteer at The Club, but you do need to have an open attitude and be prepared to step out of your comfort zone. Volunteers with special needs are also very much welcomed.

Max says he was surprised at how quickly he was accepted into The Club as ‘family’. But even more than that he’s been impressed with how accepting people are of each other.

“Every one I meet has their own story and is easy to talk to and understanding of everyone’s differences and similarities,” he says.

Alfie is now eight years old, and he and big brother Noah enjoy their time at The Club. “They love going to the parties and events that are open to all ages, and they hang out with me at the drop-in whenever they can,” says Alice.

The vision that Alice and Renee started with seven years ago has become real. “For me personally The Club means belonging,” says Alice. “Being a part of a place where people just ‘get it’, where we’re not different or extraordinary, where I feel hopeful about my family’s future, I feel connected and supported, and I see the benefits of being just exactly who we are.”

Interested in finding out more about The Club? Yay! For volunteering information, contact Jackie Rivers, Program Officer, theclubmembers@gmail.com. For information on becoming a member or any other questions, contact Alice Evans, Executive Director, registerinfotheclub@gmail.com.