



fondation
HABILITAS
foundation



Good News

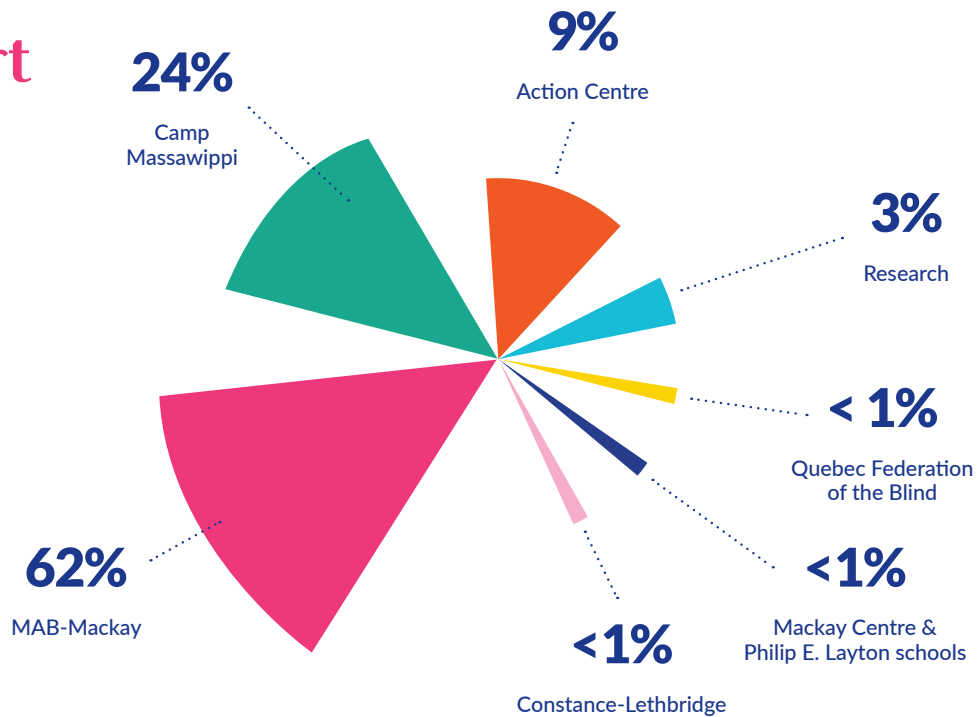
Habilitas Foundation
Impact Report

FALL 2025

You make a difference!

Habilitas Foundation’s mission is to empower and improve the lives of people living with sensory impairments and physical disabilities through philanthropy, partnership and leadership. The inspirational stories featured within this Impact Report are made possible through precious support like yours. Thank you!

Your support at work*



* In addition, Habilitas’ Greatest Needs Fund allows us the flexibility to act quickly and thoughtfully as priorities emerge.

How to reach us

Habilitas Foundation
7010 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, QC H4B 1R3
(514) 488-0043
info@habilitas.ca

Learn more about our work at habilitas.ca

@habilitas.fondation
 fondation-habilitas-foundation
 @habilitas4037



A Word From Foundation Leadership

As I sit down to write this letter, it occurs to me that this is actually one of my favourite work moments of the year. It gives me a moment to pause and take stock of the amazing network that makes our work, and the work of our partners, possible.

Behind every milestone you’ll read about in this report is a team of dedicated professionals, generous donors, and supportive friends and family who help bring these achievements to life.

The life-changing programs championed by Habilitas Foundation are powered by individuals who show up day after day with a deep commitment to making a difference.

Your generosity, your belief in what we can accomplish together, is what fuels our passion and drives our mission of creating a world of increased access, equity and inclusion for people of all ages living with physical disabilities.

Inside these pages, you’ll find inspiring stories that reflect the best of who we are when we work together: stories of hope, strength of the human spirit, perseverance, and impact. You’ll meet the people behind the numbers and see how your support makes their lives better.

Thank you for being part of this community, for your trust in our work, and for believing in what we are building, one gift, one service, one person at a time.

Happy reading!

Theodora

Theodora Brinckman

Executive Director



Matthew Chausse
Chair of the Board



On behalf of the Board of Directors, it brings me great joy to share with you the Fall 2025 Habilitas Foundation Impact Report.

The people and programs highlighted in these pages represent just a small fraction of the incredible work made real through the generosity and compassion of our community—a community I’m so proud to belong to.

In a world that can often feel fractured or divided, your commitment to elevating the values of inclusion and accessibility makes a powerful statement. Now more than ever, the positive impact of our joint efforts is a reminder of what can be achieved when we unite behind a shared vision.

Thanks to your generosity, we’re helping people grow in their skills, their confidence, their independence, and their sense of hope. Every day, the work you make possible is changing lives in meaningful ways. We’re deeply grateful to you for standing with us on this mission.

I would also like to acknowledge my fellow directors for their leadership, our partners on the ground for their collaboration and expertise, the Foundation staff for their passion and commitment, and you, the donors, for your trust, generosity, and caring.

None of the beautiful stories you’ll read here could have come to life without you.

Yours in gratitude,
Matthew

A Second Chance At Life

Rickson was just ten years old when his life changed forever.

Growing up in the Democratic Republic of Congo in the 1990s, Rickson lived with conflict in the background – but like most children, he still found moments of joy. He went to school, played soccer with friends and tried to live as normally as possible.

One afternoon, a routine soccer game took a tragic turn. While retrieving the ball from a neighbour’s yard, one of the boys accidentally triggered an explosive device. Two of Rickson’s friends were tragically killed. Others lost their legs. Rickson was lucky to have survived, but the intense flash from the blast severely damaged his retinas. He would never see again.

Rickson began attending a special school for blind children in a different city, where he learned to read braille and skills such as using a white cane. There, he developed a passion for music, and discovered he could play as well as sighted children. But the ravages of war resurfaced once again. Rickson felt his best chance for safety was to leave his home country, so he headed out alone for South Africa.

Despite his resilience, life there was hard. Thanks to the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, Rickson found his way to Canada. For the first time

in a long time, he could imagine a different future. He spent six years in Winnipeg, working and honing his musical skills. In 2023, he made the leap to Montreal, drawn by its vibrant music scene.

Starting over again in an entirely new city as a blind person was daunting. Rickson found comfort in song-writing, playing keyboard and singing. And with a little help from the MAB-Mackay, he made a new beginning.

“When I arrived in Montreal, I needed a job and help building my skills,” remembers Rickson. “The MAB-Mackay gave me so much more than therapy, even helped me to find work. They trained me on computers, which was essential to landing my job. They even visited my workspace with me so I could become familiar with the environment, the lunch area and the bathroom.”

The MAB-Mackay staff also worked with Rickson on his white cane skills, and trained him how to take the bus and metro on his own to work, the bank and the grocery store. Other life skills training included preparing food and maintaining his apartment.

“Being able to get about safely and with confidence, even on snowy days in the winter, is very important to my independence and quality of life,” says Rickson “Now, they’re helping prepare me for a guide dog too, which will open up my world even more.”

Today, Rickson continues to write and perform his own blend of pop, reggae, rumba and funk. His next goal is to study political science and work for the United Nations. “With my life experience, I believe I can be an important instrument for peace,” he says. The MAB-Mackay will continue to support Rickson on this journey.

“I can’t imagine my life without the amazing team at the MAB-Mackay. Thanks to them, nothing can stop blind people like me from fulfilling our dreams,” says Rickson.

Last year, more than 1,300 people of all ages with visual impairments found care and hope at the MAB-Mackay. It’s thanks to the generosity of donors to the Habilitas Foundation that essential services such as the low vision clinic, optician care, orientation and mobility training, as well as technology and facility upgrades are possible.



Sleeping Under The Stars

There’s something truly special about Camp Massawippi.

For more than 70 years, campers have returned summer after summer to embark on a journey of fun, friendship and self-discovery.

Days are filled with activities tailored to every interest and ability, including canoeing, adapted waterskiing, or simply relaxing with friends at the beach. For those who prefer indoor adventures, there is dance, woodworking, drama, arts and crafts, and even pet therapy.

As the sun dips below the trees, campers take in the pink and orange sunsets along the lake, followed by songs, stories and laughter around the campfire.

It’s in these quiet, glowing moments that the magic of Camp Massawippi really shines – a sense of belonging, freedom and pure joy that lingers long after the summer ends.

And this summer, that magic grew even stronger.

Camp Massawippi is constantly striving to go further in offering campers enhanced experiences of discovery and growth. And this year, an exciting new adventure awaited the campers – the chance to spend a night in the forest, surrounded by the sounds, scents and stillness of nature.



Nestled among the hills of Camp Massawippi’s main site, tucked away from all the hustle and bustle, lies a secluded clearing where two custom-built yurts were added just in time for summer 2025. These cozy, round structures – part tent, part cabin – were designed to provide a unique “camp within a camp” experience for campers to sleep under the stars.

“The new yurts in the woods are a great addition to our camp,” says Cara, the camp’s Animation Coordinator. “Designed for accessibility and inclusion, the yurts have opened up opportunities for our campers to fully participate in the magic of camp life.”

Visits to the yurts are more than just a sleepover – they are an immersive journey into nature. Small groups of campers arrive in the afternoon, with plenty of time to get settled before supper arrives from the dining hall.

“Our nature specialist leads an interactive activity on the different types and properties of leaves, fostering an appreciation of the environment,” explains Cara. “They also learn to build a fire and roast marshmallows before going to bed. The campers love the experience and the new memories they’ve made.”

Programs like this at Camp Massawippi don’t happen on their own. They require planning, care, creativity and resources. Habilitas Foundation believes that every child deserves to experience the joy of a summer spent in nature, and the freedom to wake up in a world where possibilities are limited only by the number of hours in a day. Donor generosity makes this a reality, one camper, one adventure and one magical summer at a time.



Children Grow and Connect Through Music Therapy

When Veola was diagnosed as profoundly deaf at the age of one, her mother’s first reaction was sorrow. “I thought that she would never hear the sound of my voice, hear music or be able to sing or talk,” says Veola’s mother Leala. “But after an audiologist told me about cochlear implants, our lives changed. Now at three years old, Veola can sing, talk, dance and hear all the wonderful sounds the world has to offer.”



While cochlear implants gave Veola access to sound, she required training to help her to distinguish sounds, understand what they meant, and start producing spoken words. An important part of that support was the Music Therapy Program at the MAB-Mackay.

“I help music help people,” explains Music Therapist Tiana Malone. “It’s so rewarding to introduce babies with cochlear implants to the new world of sound, or use songs and instruments with visually-impaired children to build skills using their auditory strengths.”

Tiana also uses rhythm and music to help children learn to walk steadier, stronger and longer. For those with communication disorders, she sings with them to practice speech sounds or solidify a concept.

The Music Therapy Program at MAB-Mackay is unique as it is fully integrated into the rehabilitation approach, and recognized as an important way to help

children achieve their therapy goals. The program is the most targeted in Quebec, with adapted tools that support the children’s diverse sensory, motor and language needs.

“The physiotherapists, audiologists, speech language pathologists and other professionals on the team recognize the value of music therapy and the unique tools it brings to the rehab journey. The diversity of musical sounds and the multisensory nature of music therapy enable children to explore their environment,” says Tiana.

Children in Quebec are receiving cochlear implants earlier, some as young as nine months of age, which requires a more creative and flexible approach to auditory stimulation. As this population is often new to the world of hearing, their brains require intensive, repeated and thoughtful exposure to sound and language to develop new pathways. Music is a

powerful tool to help with this goal. At the same time, music helps to bring these children and their families together in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways.

“Every parent interacts in musical ways with their child,” explains Tiana. “They sway, they rock, they sing, they imitate. It’s a natural way of being with children. Emotionally, it can connect us with time, place and each other. A quiet lullaby can connect a parent with a child in a way that they might not be able to outside of music.”

It’s not surprising that demand for music therapy is growing at the MAB-Mackay, including for many children with more complex needs.

For Veola and others like her, music therapy is having a profound impact on their development. It has offered Veola a unique and powerful outlet to express herself – especially in ways that more traditional therapies may not have.

Through music, she’s been able to communicate her emotions and connect with her parents and family members without relying solely on spoken language.

The rhythm, melody, and movement involved in music therapy seem to tap into a more instinctive side, allowing her to show joy, curiosity and even frustration in ways that are natural and safe.

“I’m so grateful for Tiana’s deeply personalized and emotionally responsive approach with our daughter,” says Leala. “She doesn’t just focus on goals, she meets Veola where she is, honouring her unique ways of connecting and communicating. Their sessions together are joyful, playful and meaningful, creating a space where Veola feels seen and empowered. As a mom, I couldn’t be more grateful for the doors this is opening for our little girl.”

Each year, more than 1,700 babies, children and young adults with auditory, visual, motor and communication impairments are cared for at the MAB-Mackay, at no cost to their families.

Through generous donor support, Habilitas Foundation funds essential programming not covered by the government such as music therapy. Plans are under way to extend this healing and patient-centred therapy approach to even more children, as well as to adults cared for by the Centre.

“The creativity of what I do is what motivates me most. I love trying to ‘solve the puzzle’ of how the multisensory properties of music can help address a child’s need or a goal,” says music therapist Tiana.



A Brand New Wheelchair Department

Imagine going to a movie or out to eat. You're seated in a comfortable chair for an hour or more, shifting your legs, leaning back, maybe changing positions without even thinking about it.



Now, imagine a child with a physical disability who must spend the better part of their day in one position, with little capacity to move. Much of their life may be spent in a wheelchair, fighting gravity and facing challenges with mobility.

The MAB-Mackay believes that every child deserves access to the world around them, a chance to fully enjoy their childhood, and to participate in many of the everyday activities that most kids take for granted. The Centre's renowned "Seating Department" makes this possible.

Since 1977, this department has been designing and customizing wheelchairs, walkers, specialized high chairs, and adapted strollers for children with conditions that affect their ability to walk, to move around independently, or to hold their upper bodies upright. Over 625 babies, children and young adults are served each year – all at no cost to the families.

"We've been coming here since my daughter got her first wheelchair when she was three and a half years old," says Jennifer, mother of nine-year old Charlotte (pictured above), who was born with spina bifida, a

condition affecting control and strength in her legs. "Having a wheelchair has opened so many doors for her. She's now able to self-propel, to keep up with friends and family, and to be more independent. Charlotte can really be part of everything."

Over the years, an increasing number of children have been referred for mobility and wheelchair services – and with this growth has come more complex needs. To keep up, the team gradually spread into adjacent areas. Meanwhile, technology for power wheelchairs, including navigation and control systems, has advanced significantly.

But while the work evolved, the environment did not. The space hadn't been renovated since it opened. A refresh was long overdue to create a space that matches the positivity, hope and opportunity offered by the Seating Department.

"The space felt cold and didn't reflect what we're really about: welcoming children and their families at a time that's often difficult and emotionally heavy," explains occupational therapist Dominique Gélinas-Bronsard.

The makeover was entrusted to Smilezone, an organization whose mission is to make tough days a little brighter for kids receiving treatment in hospitals and healthcare facilities. With more than 400 "Smilezones" across Canada, this was their first in Quebec.

The renovations include a bright and colourful new waiting area with different activities to occupy the children, comfortable seating, a state-of-the-art assessment room, and even a breastfeeding room for enhanced privacy.

"The transformation is incredible. The space is now warm, welcoming, and full of life. As soon as the elevator doors open, you're met with bright colours and vibrant visuals that set the tone. A fun little path helps guide families along the way," says Dominique.

"The new waiting area is filled with nature-inspired spaces where kids can move around, play, or just relax. It feels calm and inviting, which has made a real difference. There's less anxiety now and fewer tears. Even those tough moments, like discussing a child's first wheelchair, feels easier for parents."

The refresh was a welcome change for Charlotte and

her family, who visit on a regular basis for upgrades and repairs to her wheelchair.

"I remember how overwhelming it was in the beginning," recalls Jennifer. "Charlotte was little and didn't want to sit still. The assessments were long and demanding, since they had to take so many measurements to make sure her chair fit just right."

"Appointments here can be long, but now we have a space that's so much more comfortable and friendly. Charlotte says it's great!" explains her mother Jennifer. "It makes a real difference to have this amazing new environment that truly helps kids feel safe, engaged, and relaxed."

Creating patient-centred healing environments like this at the MAB-Mackay depend on donor support. Habilitas Foundation is grateful to the generous and compassionate donors who helped to make this welcoming, calming and uplifting space a reality for children and their families.



A Choir That Raises Voices And Spirits

Music is often referred to as a universal language. Its rhythms and melodies resonate on a primal level, triggering emotional and physical responses regardless of who we are or how we move through the world. Music and song are unifying forces, and at the Action Centre, they are now serving as tools for exploration and development of talent in a safe, supported and encouraging atmosphere.

Since 1998, the Action Centre has provided a second home for adults living with physical disabilities, where they can enjoy a sense of community and belonging. Members participate in activities that stimulate the mind and soul, as well as promote physical and mental health – all with the acceptance, dignity and respect each individual deserves.

Recently, Monday afternoons at the Action Centre have taken on a special feel. There's a hum in the air, and if you're passing by you might even make out the faint sounds of a keyboard being played.

That's because Mondays are when the Action Centre Choir gathers. Membership is open -- there are no auditions or expectations. The only prerequisites are a love of music and a generous spirit.

Each week, participants are introduced to different types of music and encouraged to use their voices in new ways. Non-verbal members follow along with the lyrics, feeling the rhythms and melodies that surround them.

For all members, regardless of ability, choir rehearsal is an opportunity to communicate in a less structured way. Where words may constrict, music expands, giving everyone the space and freedom to express themselves more fully.

The choir has already performed in public twice, and encouraged by enthusiastic audience response, they look forward to additional appearances in the future.



“
When I sing with the choir, I forget my wheelchair. I feel like I belong, like I have something important to share. Mondays are the best part of my week.
”
- ACTION CENTRE CHOIR MEMBER

As with all activities at the Action Centre, coming together with a shared goal creates a unique sense of belonging and inclusion that is hard to find anywhere else. Challenges are met and overcome, and accomplishments are celebrated as a group.

At the heart of the Action Centre is a spirit that puts people first and a steadfast belief in the power of possibility.

Thanks to donor generosity, Habilitas Foundation is able to continue elevating the Action Centre, its programming, and its efforts to enrich and expand the daily lives of its members.



QR CODE to
documentary film
of the Action Centre
choir

Shaping the future with a Legacy Gift

“I first learned about the organization many years ago, when it was known as the *Montreal Association for the Blind*, or MAB. It started with my husband, who recorded school and college books for blind students. I was a teacher, and I recognized how important this gesture was for the students.

I thought the MAB was a worthwhile charity to support, so I started sending in a donation to their foundation every year. It just made sense to me. My first gift was 32 years ago.

A number of years later, my niece Irene told me how helpful the MAB was to her when she resumed her studies at Concordia. She was born with cataracts, which were removed when she was young. She was able to finish high school and CEGEP without any particular help for her condition. Then one day when she was in university, she discovered the MAB in the telephone book and gave them a call.

They started by testing her vision and diagnosed her as legally blind. They provided her with specialized



support, technology and guidance that helped her to pursue her studies. She went on to earn a doctorate degree in music at McGill. Today, she's a professor in voice and music – and she just loves it!

I've witnessed how this institution truly changes lives in ways that words can't describe. They really helped make Irene a whole person. That's why I made the decision to include the Habilitas Foundation in my will a few years ago.”
- Mary, Legacy Donor

Every legacy gift, no matter how big or small, helps build a future where people with physical and sensory disabilities can live with dignity, independence and joy. If you're interested in learning how you can leave a gift of lasting impact in your will, please reach out to Sean Zikman, Director of Philanthropy, for a confidential conversation at (514) 488-0043 ext. 51410 or send an email to sean.zikman@habilitas.ca.



“
As someone born with low vision, I grew up frustrated by my limitations as I struggled to keep up with my sighted peers. My life changed when I discovered the MAB, as it was known at the time. With the support of their caring specialists and access to visual aids, I was able to return to university, and transform my professional and personal life. They've been by my side for more than 30 years and I'm so grateful. I'm delighted that my Aunt Mary has made such a special gift to Habilitas in her will to help future generations of people with visual impairments get the support they need.
”
- IRENE, PROFESSOR OF VOICE AND MUSIC

10 GREAT THINGS YOU MAKE POSSIBLE



Help people who are blind learn to cross the street, take the bus and metro, and find their way in the community safely with white cane skills



Provide custom-designed wheelchairs, walkers and adapted strollers to babies and children with disabilities



Offer a unique summer camp experience to youth with physical disabilities in a fun and safe environment



Empower adults with physical disabilities to overcome social isolation, learn, build connections, embrace life, and truly thrive



Make the dream of driving a car or motorcycle a reality for people living with physical disabilities



Loan specially-adapted therapeutic toys to babies with multiple impairments to promote motor development at home



Help people with cochlear implants train their brains to understand and interpret sound



Offer training in adapted computer software and technology to people who are blind



Help preschool-aged children with communication disorders gain essential language skills



Empower children with disabilities through access to adapted sports such as wheelchair basketball, sailing, and downhill skiing



Habilitas Foundation is a leader in championing the needs of individuals with physical disabilities through the following organizations: