# Physiotherapy student Leah Schwartz inspired by clinical placement at Alyn Hospital in Israel

**By Leah Schwartz**

I first heard about the Alyn Hospital Pediatric and Adolescent Rehabilitation Center in an e-mail Steven Kimmel sent to my father in 2008. Steven, among his many other charitable activities, raises funds and participates in the Wheels of Love International Bike Ride for the Children of Alyn Hospital that takes place each fall in Israel.

As part of my master's program in physiotherapy at Queen's University, I had the option of doing an international six-week clinical placement, in a hospital or clinic outside of Canada. I have always loved working with children – I have been a counsellor at Camp B'nai Brith of Ottawa for the past eight years and have volunteered working with children at the Hotel Dieu Hospital in Kingston – so doing a pediatric placement in Israel at the Alyn Hospital was a goal of mine since I started in physiotherapy.

When I arrived at the Alyn Hospital in Jerusalem on November 4, 2009, I was immediately welcomed by the entire physiotherapy department. I had the opportunity of working one-on-one with each of the physiotherapists in the department and of observing each of their approaches. The Alyn Hospital treats children and adolescents who are afflicted with a broad range of physical disabilities. These are children who have been injured in road accidents and terrorist attacks, children suffering from congenital conditions and children suffering from physical limitations due to various illnesses.

Every morning, Debbie, a volunteer from the United States, and I worked together helping many of the children in the Intensive Care Respiratory Rehabilitation Unit into their standers. There were premature babies, children with muscular dystrophy and spinal cord injuries in this unit. Some of the children would then head downstairs to the hospital's school. Throughout the day, I helped kids in the hospital's in-patient and out-patient clinics as well as the Educational Medical Day Care Center.

Treatment sessions were done all over the hospital from the playground, to the basketball court, on bikes and riding hand-propelled cars down the hallways. Two people dressed as clowns work with the physiotherapists and other departments to entertain the kids and create games designed to treat them. There is also a woman who does animal therapy with the kids using animals ranging from rabbits and guinea pigs to birds and snakes, many of which live at the hospital. There were children who were otherwise unable to speak who could express themselves when playing with the animals. Others benefit from the hydrotherapy pool located within the facility.

What I saw was just a glimpse into one department of the Alyn Hospital and it is truly an inspirational place. The Alyn Hospital treats children of all ages and all faiths, religions and cultures under one roof. I had the opportunity to work with and observe Orel, a Jewish boy, and Marya, a Muslim girl. They are the same age and met during their treatments at the hospital where they became good friends. Orel was wounded by a rocket fired by Hamas from Gaza, while Marya was paralyzed by an Israeli missile, which killed her mother and injured her father and brother. Neither child has any idea why they were almost killed. Their friendship gives hope for future co-existence of Arabs and Jews in the Middle East and clearly demonstrates that the Alyn Hospital treats all children equally.

I had the opportunity to welcome Steven Kimmel, the Ottawa contingent and more than 600 other cyclists in the Wheels of Love bike ride when they rode into the hospital on November 5. The celebration at the end of the ride gives the hospital staff the opportunity to thank the 370 international riders and almost 250 Israelis who rode 500 kilometres to support the 200-bed non-profit hospital.

I learned many techniques at the Alyn Hospital that will help in my practice of physiotherapy and I look forward to returning to visit my friends and former co-workers on my next visit to Israel.

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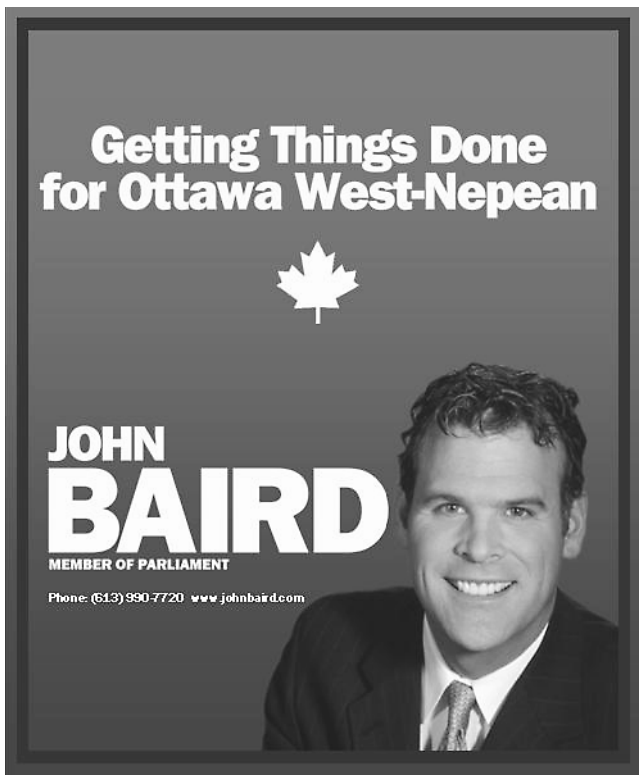
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