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A big smile beneath the mask

After months of isolation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, young people joyfully reunite with their friends from Faith and Light for an unexpected and much appreciated outdoor activity.

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July. We were finally getting back to normal life... most of us, after the pandemic had forced us into reinventing many aspects of our life and limiting our social interactions.

Staying in touch with family, friends and other people dear to us required almost necessarily an online platform. During the online meetings with our dear friends of *Faith and Light*, Brendan mentioned several times: “My summer camp has been cancelled”.

Our friends of *Faith and Light*

Mary-Jo’s fragile health hadn’t made it possible for her and her mom to get out of home for several months. Cheryl and her parents, Paul, Lee and his mom hadn’t been out much either. Justin’s parents hadn’t been able to see him for quite a while. The list continued. Our friends of *Faith and Light* never cease to impress us with their cheerfulness and optimism, but it was clear that many of them had found the time of the pandemic very challenging, not the least because of an increased sense of isolation.

Faith and Light is an international association that groups communities welcoming people with intellectual disabilities and their family, bringing all together in a Christian spirit of friendship, sharing, prayer and celebration. For several years now, students from Riverview Study Centre, in Montreal give a hand to the *Faith and Light* Holy Family community, where we have made many friends.

Why not an outdoor activity?

Things were reopening again, even though several restrictions were still in place, so indoor activities were not really an option. But something had to be done. And the idea crystallized... a painting class for our friends of *Faith and Light*, using art as a means to share a special time in family. The idea was received with great excitement. Carlos found painting supplies and, being a

professional artist, he found it natural to share his passion for painting, so he volunteered to teach the participants how to paint. Emilia and Andy offered their large backyard, so we only needed to choose an afternoon with good weather. And what an afternoon it was!

Lots of talent!

It was wonderful to see the smiles and the excitement, beneath the masks. As the paintings resembled more and more the original model (Dori and Nemo, from the famous animation movie), we discovered lots of talent. At the beginning, some found it difficult to grab the brush but with a little help from Carlos or their parents, to guide the movement of the brush on the canvas, they started applying the colours, mixing pigment and water on their own, and going back and forth between the

palette, the water glass and the canvas. Those who couldn't come in person joined online; others were following Carlos' instructions directly on site. As we were putting back the supplies in the van we borrowed from Riverview, we were all saying "This was just a first experience. We need to repeat it again soon." And we were also wearing a big smile beneath our masks.

Mario Jardon

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