

# Coffee & Cocktails with **Hear Québec**



## *Staying connected during the COVID-19 pandemic*

The COVID-19 pandemic has had an effect on many different aspects of our lives. One of the most challenging parts was adapting to our new way of socializing – or rather, a lack thereof.

In the spring of 2020, we took an active role in checking in on our members and making sure they had all the support they needed. In those calls, there were two themes that came up: 1) Due to my hearing loss, I am used to being isolated and not being social, and 2) I am struggling to maintain contact with my loved ones; the phone is challenging and I miss meeting in person so I can lipread and use my other communication strategies.

The members value coming to the office and classes in person. So often, Hear Québec has been referred to as a home in which they can talk to and learn from people who understand them. Members in our speechreading classes, especially in the Plus class, benefit from these friendly connections. They exchange advice and help each other get through the challenges they face due to their hearing loss. They valued this social aspect so much that a small group started meeting on their own for coffee once a month. COVID-19 took all of that away.

This past fall we knew we had to find alternative ways to bring our community together. Luckily, by that time we had discovered Google Meet with captioning. This video conferencing service allows us to meet in a safe, virtual and accessible way. Currently, it is the only video conferencing service that offers free closed captioning. Other platforms offer captioning, but it is very costly and provided by a third party.

With the new fall sessions looming and COVID-19 restrictions in place, we knew we had to take a more digital approach to programming. In our fall programming, we initiated digital **HEARTalks** (workshops) and we highlighted the Canadian Hard of Hearing Association (CHHA) Read Our Lips online speechreading class as a tool. However, something was missing, and this is when the idea for social video calls sparked. We wanted to provide a safe and accessible way for the members to socialize, learn, and support each other, as they have always done.

In mid-October, we had our first "Connection Call", a pilot project, initially with a small group of five members. Since then, the group has been slowly increasing. During the first call, we spent time getting to know each other and sharing our hearing journeys. Throughout the fall, we met biweekly.



Every call had a topic and the structure allowed the members to converse and share openly. We have discussed advocating, tricks for communicating in public with a hearing loss and so much more.

The positive response from the members who are attending is overwhelming. They LOVE it. And so do we.

After the holidays, we picked up these calls again. Unanimously, everyone in the call wished to make the call a weekly occurrence and for it to be short and sweet (under an hour). Missing this social connection and eager to fill their schedule with plans to look forward to, these Connection Calls evolved to Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec.

These calls are quickly taking on a life of their own. More and more people are joining, and we are excited to announce that we are starting a monthly evening session. For this evening session, with a 5 à 7 vibe, we are planning to have guest hosts as well as fun games and activities, all from the comfort of your couch. Great food and drinks will be provided by you!

Our first evening call is on March 30th, 2021, with the cutest, funnest, and most amazing host ever – none other than...Abby Stonehouse, Montréal stand-up comedian. Join us as we bid a final farewell to Abby's amazing experience with Hear Québec (see page 11). She has some really big surprises, giveaways, and local talents to entertain you that night! We are excited to kick off our first evening session Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec with a bang. Do not miss it!

Coffee & Cocktails with Hear Québec is sure to have something for everyone. This spring, these calls continue and we want to invite you to join the fun. We will be having new topics, special guest speakers, games and, of course, a lot of laughs.

How do you join? Easy! Mark your interest on the Spring 2021 registration form. You will get an email a few days before the video call with the link to the Google Meet event. When it is time for the meeting, just click the link in your email and it will bring you to the video call.

If you feel a bit intimidated by the process of joining an online video conference, we will go through this one-on-one so you can get a taste of what it is like beforehand. We have helped many members over the last few months try Google Meet for the first time and little by little it gets easier.

