

A Story of Resilience



By Heidi Wager

Hear Québec is more than just a couple of offices and few staff members. We are and have always been a community where people feel **connected, supported, and understood**. After working here for almost 8 years, I have had the opportunity and pleasure to meet members who have inspired and guided the work we have accomplished as an organization. However, there are many untold stories that have not been shared before. Not everyone is comfortable writing or sharing their stories, so I thought if you would let me, this time I could tell you a little story that has inspired and impacted me both professionally and personally and that I will always keep with me.

Imagine: I'm sitting at my desk focused and working away - answering emails and planning the upcoming programs, when all of sudden a ball of feisty energy walks into my office (didn't stop at the door or knock) and sits in front of my desk and introduces herself. She starts telling me about who she is and what type of person she is. To be honest, at first I was shocked. A feisty ball of energy is an understatement; she was a ray of sunshine and hope. She would have us laughing so hard our cheeks would hurt. You had to stop your work as she made sure you paid attention to the conversation. She started coming in every week, and these weekly visits would last at least an hour or two, even more sometimes. She commanded the room when she was here!

She would talk about her children and grandchildren, things that pissed her off, what was going on in the community, and what we should be doing about it. Her attitude and sense of humor are intoxicating, but no one in the office could get any work done when she came in. We didn't fight it; we knew better. We would grab a coffee or tea, sit, and

listen to her while trying to find little moments where we could make suggestions on ways to help. She would often tell us that she liked coming to the office because she never felt like she was imposing or like she was bothering us.

She had some strong opinions about what was right or wrong and what we all could do about the latest issues. She had profound hearing loss; honestly, I'm not sure if she could hear 50% of our conversations, but her presence in the office was part of our weekly routine now. As the years passed, she was a regular in the office. She would bring in homemade snacks and our conversation deepened over time. She would open up about some very heavy and serious issues she was having with her family and how frustrating it was that her hearing loss was affecting those relationships that she loved so much. It was clear that she needed more support but had some trust issues with health professionals. She told us that she felt free to express herself and safe doing so with us because she felt understood and never felt judged.



"Be strong, be fearless, be beautiful. And believe that anything is possible when you have the right people there to support you."

- Misty Copeland

Overtime, we were able to build a relationship with her and establish some trust with her. After a while, we were able to offer some solutions to some of her big issues. We focused on finding her professional resources and some alternate solutions to problems with her hearing aids. We gave her information about what resources were available for her and encouraged her to investigate them herself and share with us next time what she found out. We worked with our community partners in finding her support that made sense for her. This took some time, but she made some great decisions to better her hearing health including getting fitted with a cochlear implant.

Leading up to the surgery, she was so scared; she would come in questioning her decision over and over again. Maybe this is the wrong thing? Maybe I'm too old for this? What if this? What if that? She was always asking us if she made the right decision. We would always ask her the same question? Why did you choose to do this in the first place? Of course, we knew the answer. We knew it would help her tremendously with her hearing, but she needed to remind herself why she was doing this. She needed to own the decision, and she needed to feel like she was in control of her decision. She had to believe in herself and her decision no matter the outcome.

We didn't see her as much after her surgery and during her rehabilitation which was unusually hard for her. We began to worry about her and wonder how

she was doing. Unfortunately, this is the hardest part of what we (non-profit staff) do. Because we are not considered "health professionals", we have no choice but to wait until she comes into the office to get an update.

I will never forget that day she came in; all of us were so happy to see her doing well. It was clear that she was still adjusting to the new equipment, but I will never forget the look on her face as she sat in front of me teary eyed and told me that this was the hardest thing she had ever done but she had absolutely no regrets despite all the complications. She said that she was forever grateful to me and the team for encouraging her and giving her the gift of hearing.

It was hard not to get teary eyed with her. The tissue box was passed around a few times that day as we laughed and cried together. This visit was considerably shorter than the others as she was still recovering. As she was getting ready to leave, I wanted to express how proud she should be of herself for having the courage to continue and not give up. She looked me straight in the eye and said, "No, thank you for always being there and showing me that I am worth the time!"

Of course she was worth the time; we are all worth the time, and we are so honored to be here to give you that time. Thank you for trusting us; you have no idea how much you inspire us everyday.



Hear Entendre Québec

7000 Rue Sherbrooke West/Ouest, Montréal, Québec H4B 1R3
Phone/Tél: 514-488-5552 ext/poste: 4500 | Cell/Text: 514-797-2447 | Fax: 514-489-3477
info@hearhear.org | www.hearhear.org

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