

# Opinion

## MUSKOKA MOSAIC

### Introducing Karla Struyk

BY PAULA BOON

Karla Struyk is a great hugger. "If you ever need a hug, Karla's the girl to get one from," says her mother Cathy Foyston.

Struyk loves to connect with others, whether they are children, adults or animals. Since finishing high school, she has been volunteering at the Early Years Centre, Huntsville and District Coop Nursery School and Huntsville Animal Shelter.

The 25-year-old Huntsville woman, who has Down syndrome, uses a topic book with labelled photographs to communicate about things that are important to her. On the day of our interview, she lingers over a photo of a dog. "I loved Basil," she says. "He's dead." Then she echoes her mother's reassuring, "That happens."

Born in Huntsville in 1983 as the youngest of three children, Struyk was one of the first special needs students to be integrated into regular classrooms in this area. With the support of Community Living Huntsville and her mother, Struyk attended kindergarten at Pine Glen and the rest of her elementary years at St. Mary's.

For high school, Struyk moved on to St. Dominic's, which she enjoyed very much. However, when it came time to leave school there weren't many options open to Struyk. "She was used to being a contributing part of a community, and there only seemed to be segregated options," says Foyston.

So Foyston developed a personalized schedule she called Karla's quilt – a patchwork of things Struyk can do and likes to do – and applied for funding to ensure that

Struyk would be able to participate fully in her community.

Struyk's weekly schedule is structured to give her maximum independence. She travels by taxi and town bus from one place to another and often shops at Robinson's Independent Grocer using a visual list made of pictures cut out of flyers. When Struyk is going to be shopping or buying a meal in town, she usually carries a note from her mother since it can be difficult for people who don't know her to understand her.

"Huntsville has become a very safe place for Karla because people know her," says Foyston. "The community has really taken care of her. And people have become a lot more open and accepting."

Besides volunteering, Struyk also works out at Goodlife with a personal trainer several times a week, swims often, and visits the library regularly to pick out picture books and movies. She makes a trip to Blockbuster once a week and samples widely, although she says movies like *Terminator* and *Ironman* are not to her liking. "Too scary," she says. She prefers musicals like *The Sound of Music* and *The Little Mermaid* and classics like *Wee Willie Winkie* starring Shirley Temple.

A recent discovery has given Struyk another level of independence and maturity. At the suggestion of Struyk's music/art therapist, she and her mother took a Therapeutic Touch course last fall. Therapeutic Touch is a contemporary



interpretation of several ancient healing practices in which hands are used to facilitate healing by directing the flow of energy in the field around someone's body.

"We decided she could do it. She was doing it naturally," says Foyston, adding, "During the courses, people in the group struggled to centre themselves and she's just centred. Some of the skills we were just learning she already has."

Struyk enjoyed the first course so much that she enrolled in Level 2 over the winter and plans to take Level 3 in June. One day she hopes to use her newfound skills as a volunteer at Muskoka Landing. In the meantime, she attends practice sessions and does Therapeutic Touch at home on her family, pets and farm animals.

Foyston notes that the treatments Struyk give are short but extremely effective. "She has an uncanny ability to see where people need healing," she says.

When Struyk attends practice sessions, she is respected for her ability, and this has made a big difference in her life. Therapeutic touch also gives her a way to connect with people on a level that doesn't require speech. As Foyston says, "It has given her a way of communicating we had never thought about."

*Thanks to Tracy Nita Pender for suggesting that Karla Struyk be profiled.*

## LETTERS

### Canada has its own problems with corruption, terrorism

It is our government that decides what, where and why the military are active. They call the shots, so to speak.

In her April 15 letter to the editor, Ms. Parsons defines the NATO forces mission in Afghanistan as a "combat mission," not war. In military terminology a combat mission means a fighting mission. Believe me, the term combat mission is not a euphemism for peace keeping.

I have been in the military and clearly understand that you have no choice but to obey when orders are given. You do what you are told. You may be given reasons to justify the decision, but not always. There are no arguments.

Regrettably, our troops are participating in a wasted, costly and futile mission — part of an Army of Occupation — not requested by the people of Afghanistan. The mission was badly conceived and driven by very poor judgement, at the behest of George Bush, to quote Mr. Wahl.

Afghanistan has been plagued with tribal and religious hostilities for millennia, with no end in sight. Anyone reading the history of Afghanistan knows that. It's time NATO left Afghanistan alone to work out for them-

selves how they want to run their own country, with the form of government that suits their culture, tribal and religious.

We need to show respect for any sovereign nation's decisions and choices. Anything less is arrogance on our part. Mr. Harper and other NATO leaders intend to install a stable and secure regime that is willing to behave the way our western cultures would like it to behave. In other words, Afghanistan must become a united, stable and democratic nation, without corruption and terrorism, like Canada and other western democracies.

Meanwhile, we have corruption in high places and our own "home-grown" terrorists, gun-toting gangs who push drugs and roam the streets of our cities, randomly killing innocent people and terrorizing whole communities.

Does it make any sense for Canada to be sacrificing the lives of your soldiers and burden its taxpayers with massive costs, instead of putting its own house in order and making this country a safer place for its citizens?

Hugh Reynolds  
Dorset

### Easter egg hunt an enjoyable tradition for this grandmother

I have to disagree with last week's editorial and its interpretation of the Easter egg hunt at Muskoka Heritage Place. We stood in line to start a tradition with our grandson for well over 20 minutes. We were late and the line was long.

Families were laughing together, with children meeting new friends and romping while parents waited patiently in line, even when noon passed and the gates still weren't opened. Once in we wandered to the designated area after a photo op with the Easter Bunny. There was someone talking on a microphone welcoming everyone and then continued to speak. It was more than a few words.

The children had waited in line for over half an hour and then were corralled waiting for the start with eggs to be seen everywhere.

The children thought they were told to go and then were called back to wait again. Anyone who has had children understands how difficult this is at the best of times, never mind when they're excited beyond belief and most people were attempting to have their children well in hand. To ask someone who was with a child to put eggs back was unrealistic, unnecessary and Grinchlike.

There were hundreds of eggs, if not more. I saw a lot of happy parents/grandparents and children and also heard a lot of laughter. Let's try focusing on that. We had a great time, a tradition has been started. We thank the Nutty Chocolatier and the organizers. We will be back next year.

Ginny Barter  
Huntsville

Visit us at: [www.huntsvilleforester.com](http://www.huntsvilleforester.com)

### Invest in your mental health

There doesn't seem to be a shortage of things to worry about in today's society, from the economy to worldwide conflict and the normal day-to-day stressors. Stress seems to take up an awful large piece of our lives. You would think that we would all know how to deal with stress, but our own care can suffer. We are often seduced into taking care of another's needs and we often neglect or forget to take care of our own.

May 4 to 10 is Mental Health Week and the theme for this year is "Now more than Ever: Invest in Yourself." This is an attempt to broaden the public's perception and knowledge of mental health issues in order to reduce stigma and judgment so people who have mental health issues are not afraid to seek support, help and to live their lives to the fullest. Take time to educate yourself, your family and friends. Mental illness affects everyone.

One in five Canadians will experience a mental illness during their lifetime, yet nearly two-thirds of people with a diagnosable mental illness do not seek treatment.

Ask yourself: Could your lifestyle choices be harmful to your mental health? If a challenging situation arises, are you mentally fit enough to deal with it? Does your stress affect your sleeping patterns? Are you often preoccupied with various situations and have difficulty letting go? Are you actively trying to find balance in your day-to-day life? Do you believe there is a connection between your physical and mental health? Do you often try to learn something new or do something in a different way? Do you find yourself frequently ignoring or dwelling

on negative thoughts? Are you comfortable with how you respond emotionally to day-to-day situations?

Here are some tips on how to live a healthy lifestyle: collect positive emotional thoughts; take time to daydream; learn ways to cope with negative thoughts; exercise; enjoy hobbies; share humor; treat yourself well; eat well; create positive relationships; manage stress; identify and deal with your moods; and become self aware. Become an expert on yourself. Know your limits and prioritize what truly matters to you.

As part of Mental Health Week, on Friday, May 8, the Council of Consumer/Survivor and Family Initiatives will be hosting a Mental Health Gala at the Algonquin Theatre in Huntsville. There will be an art show, draws, and Karen Liberman as seen in the CTV documentary *Fighting the Dragon* will be sharing her personal story of recovery, as well as the documentary by Laura Sky called *Extra Ordinary People*. Doors open at 6 p.m. and the movie begins at 7 p.m. For further information please call Carla Harmer at 384-5392, ext 28.

For further information regarding mental illness, you can go online and explore various websites such as [www.cmha.ca](http://www.cmha.ca) (Canadian Mental Health Association) or you can call the Muskoka-Parry Sound Community Mental Health Service at 1-866-829-7050 for information. Someone you know and love may be in need of support, and help is available.

Mark LaRouche  
community support worker with the Muskoka-Parry Sound Community Mental Health Network

### Education Huntsville seeks input from online learners

Further to an article about Education Huntsville published in the Huntsville Forester April 15, we would like to let Huntsville and Muskoka-area residents know that by keying in [educationhuntsville.ca](http://educationhuntsville.ca) on the computer they can access a host of university, college, online skills, upgrading and interesting courses online. As mentioned in the article, anyone interested in having an educationally related site linked can forward relevant information to [info@educationhuntsville.ca](mailto:info@educationhuntsville.ca).

Education Huntsville is considering

developing a support group for online learners. Apparently one of the major disincentives to completing online programs is the sense of isolation experienced by online learners. If you (or anyone you know) is studying online, we'd love to hear from you. Please let us know if you would be interested in a support network to assist you in your learning goals. Contact us at the e-mail address listed above.

R. Attfield,  
chair, Education  
Huntsville



# HEALTHCARE HEROES

## National Volunteer Week April 18 - 25, 2009 "Celebrating People in Action"

What would we do without Volunteers?

Everyday we all rely on volunteers. They feed us during emergencies, helped us get to appointments, and simply comfort those in need of a shoulder. Every hour of every day someone in our community is being helped by an unselfish and often unrecognized volunteer.

**Congratulations to all who volunteer and thank you.**

Interested in volunteering for the Huntsville Hospital Foundation?

There are envelopes to stuff, phones to answer, donors to visit, events to manage and of course funds to raise.

Give us a call anytime.

This ad sponsored by...



Live well with

**PHARMASAVE**

*Historic Downtown Huntsville*

789-7300

**Huntsville Hospital Foundation**

4-100 Frank Miller Drive

Huntsville, ON

P1H 1H7

Tel: (705) 789-0022 Ext. 350