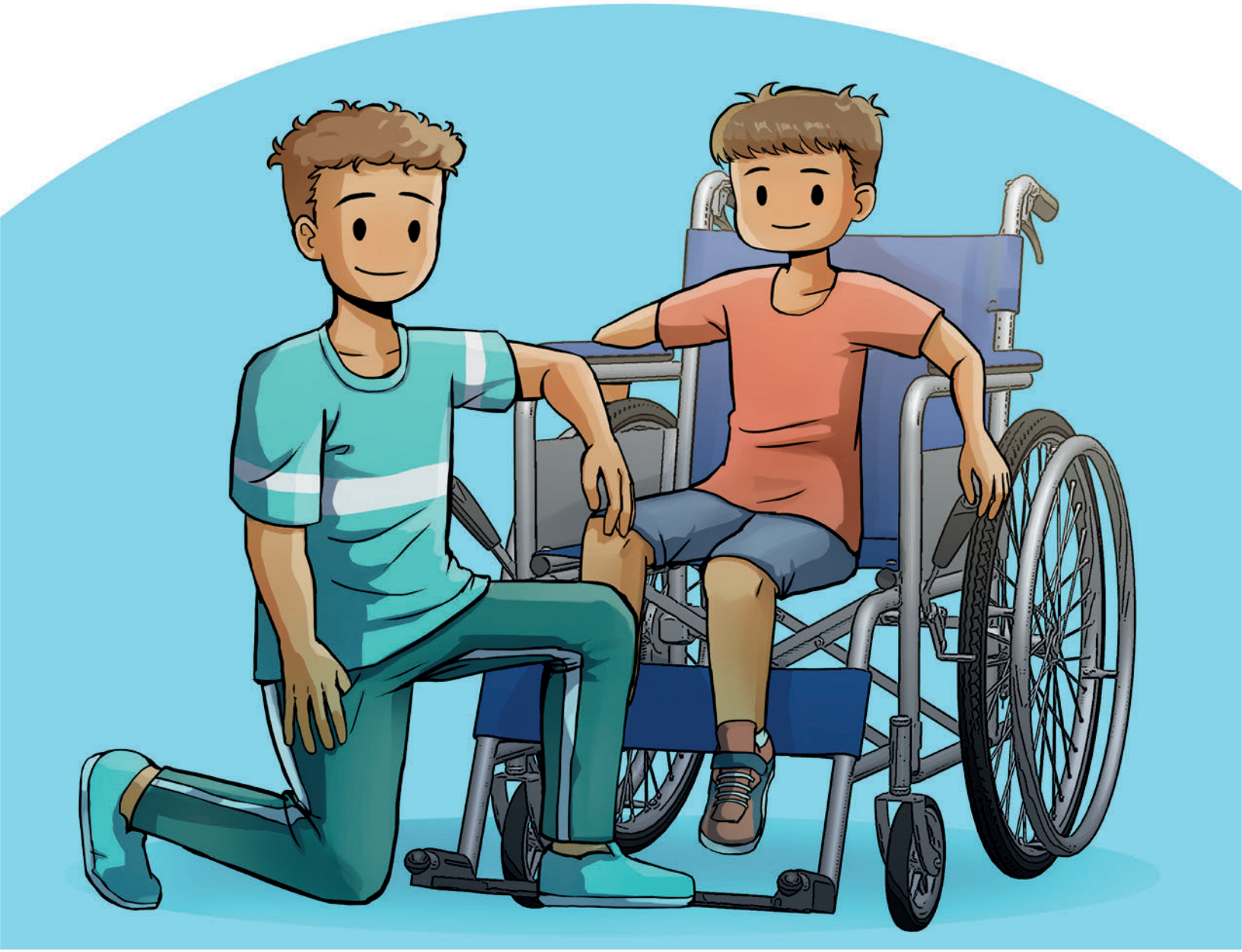
LET'S TALK ABOUT IT !

Growing up while caring: Theo's story



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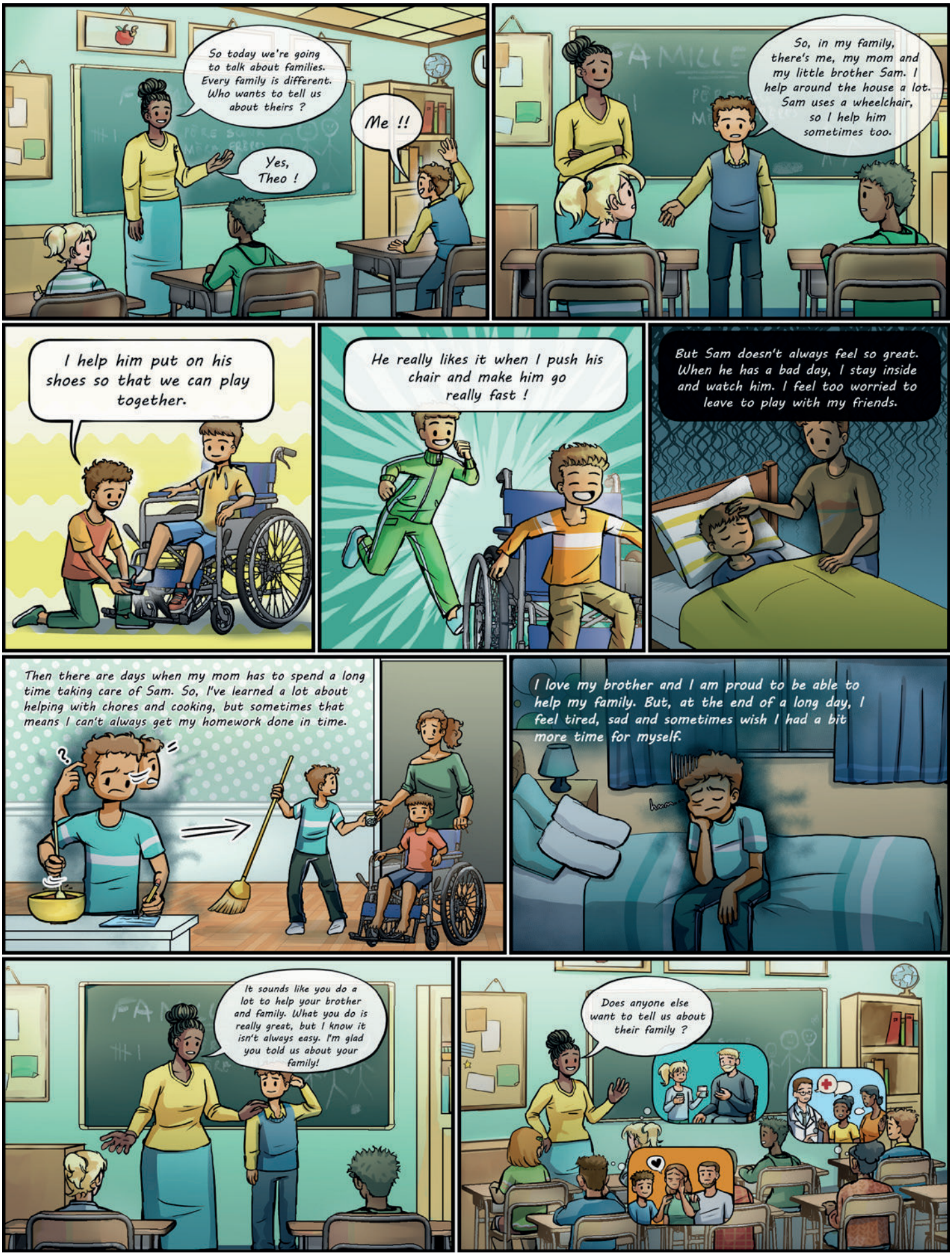

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Companion Guide for Elementary School Staff

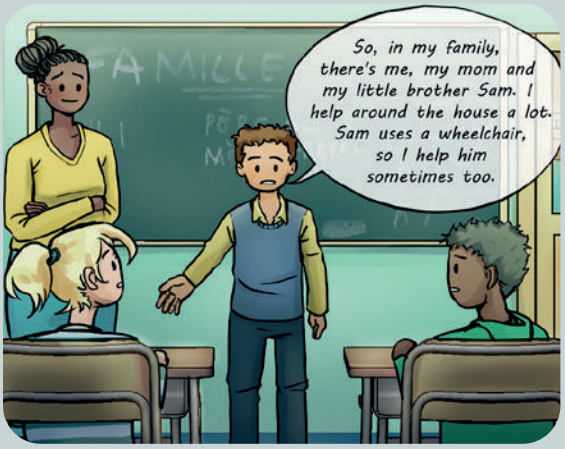
This is the companion guide for the one-page comic,
Let's talk about it? Growing up while caring: Theo's story.
Designed for elementary school staff and educators, it suggests ways to help students engage with the comic as they learn about what it's like to be a young caregiver. The guide includes information on young caregiving along with suggested classroom activities.

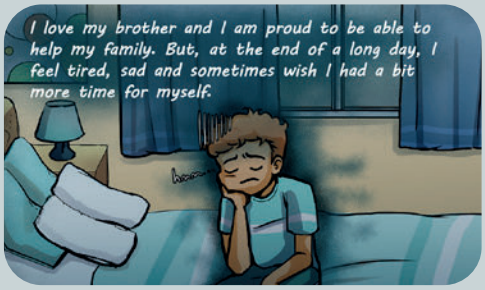
What is young caregiving?

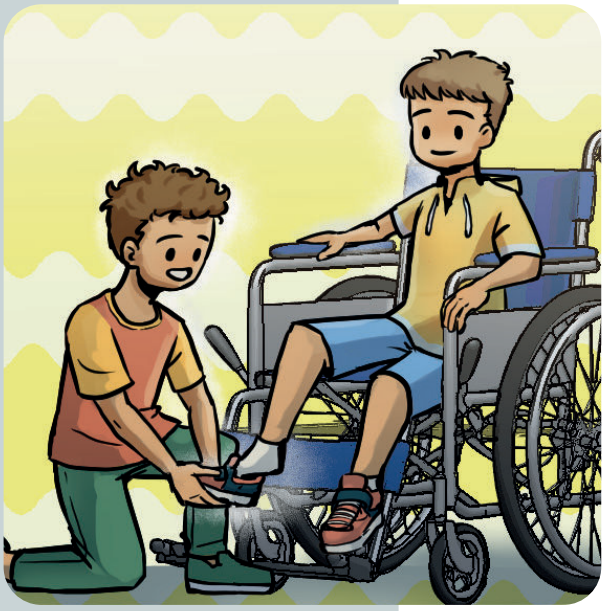
"Young caregiving" refers to situations where a child, teen or young adult helps look after someone in their immediate circle who needs support, whether due to disability, chronic illness, addiction issues or mental health challenges. This person is normally a family member (for example, a parent, sibling or grandparent), but can also be a friend or neighbour. Some children take on this role from a very young age, sometimes as early as elementary school — often without the adults around them (including the person receiving care) even realizing it. These young people are known as young caregivers (or carers).

Their responsibilities are varied and may include:

- Helping a loved one dress, get around, feed themselves, bathe or communicate.
- Providing company, supervision, entertainment or just a sympathetic ear.
- Taking on a share of the household tasks that's beyond what would normally be expected of someone their age.
- Caring for other family members, like siblings.
- During appointments, translating information relayed by professionals into the mother tongue of the person they help care for.







Why raise the topic of young caregiving in elementary school?

Being a young caregiver can affect many areas of a child's life: their emotional well-being, energy levels, learning abilities, and more broadly, their sense of identity, social participation, and the life decisions they'll face as teens and adults.

The earlier a child takes on these responsibilities, the greater the potential for negative effects. Yet young caregivers often remain invisible, whether due to a lack of awareness about their role, fear of judgment or bullying, or the difficulty many kids have in talking about what they're going through.

By raising awareness among elementary school students, we can help young people better understand their experiences as caregivers, promote the early recognition of caregiving situations, and create opportunities for meaningful and appropriate support.

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Below are three suggested activities you can do with the class after reading the comic:

These activities are designed to help elementary school teachers and staff start the conversation about what it means to be a young caregiver. All accompanying materials are available here.

Classroom discussion

1

Read the comic (as a class, in small groups or individually).

2

Ask a few open-ended questions to get the discussion started:

- What part of the story touched you?
- Had you ever heard of kids your age providing care to someone at home?
- Do you think it's hard or easy for somebody Theo's age to do this? Why?

3

As a group, identify the kinds of support illustrated in the comic (household chores, medication assistance, emotional support, etc.). Ask students if they can think of other tasks a young caregiver might perform — for example, helping with mobility or personal care.

4

As a group, discuss how Theo might feel. Invite students to identify other emotions a young caregiver could experience (fatigue, anger, frustration, pride, a sense of duty, worry, loneliness, etc.).

5

Conclude by asking students how they could help Theo if they were in the same class.

Family interdependence

1

Read the comic (as a class, in small groups or individually).

2

With the class, review the story by exploring how the family members help one another.

- Who helps whom?
- What are the needs of each family member?
- Does Theo help his little brother Sam? How?
- Does Theo help his mom? How?

The goal is to highlight the interdependent relationships between family members.

3

Distribute the activity sheet, "Things we do for each other in my family." Have students use it to draw or write down examples of what mutual support looks like in their own families.

Examples:

- Mom helps me do my homework.
- My big brother sets the table.
- Dad takes me to my swimming lessons.
- I watch over my kid brother.

4

Group discussion:

- Invite a few students to share their examples.
- Remind students that every family is unique — and also that it's normal to ask for help if certain tasks or responsibilities start feeling like too much.

Create your own comic!

1

Invite students to imagine a story about a child who helps someone close to them.

2

Distribute the comic strip template. Ask them to show how their character feels, what they like to do and what helps them feel better (e.g., talking to someone, playing with friends, going for a bike ride).

3

Have a group discussion:

- Invite a few students to share their examples.
- Ask them to reflect on the following. What role might a child take on within the family when someone close to them needs help? What kinds of feelings might they experience when helping that person?

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Classroom activity tips

Some students may have strong emotional reactions or want to share personal experiences when reading about Theo and completing the activity. Below are some tips for creating a safe and supportive classroom environment.

Before the activity

Familiarize yourself with the story beforehand to understand the themes and anticipate possible questions.

If possible, invite a psychoeducator, special education teacher or other support staff to co-facilitate or be present in the classroom. They can help you manage certain reactions or disclosures as well as provide any needed one-on-one support.

Choose the activity that best aligns with your group's age and learning levels. All of the activities can be adapted to better meet your class's needs.

Explore opportunities to enhance the activity by teaming up with a local community organization that specializes in caregiving.

To find an organization, see the resource directory put out by L'Appui pour les proches aidants.

Learn more about young caregiving.

Allow enough time for reading the comic, answering questions and completing the activity (approximately 1 hour).

During the activity

Give students enough time to read the comic carefully, or read it aloud as a group.

Remind students that they are under no obligation to share personal experiences with the class. You can use inclusive phrasing like "some people experience this" to open up discussion without infringing on anyone's right to privacy.

Notice how students respond, both verbally and non-verbally. This can help you quietly identify those who are — or may be — in a caregiving situation.

Promote active listening, respect and non-judgmental attitudes during the discussions.

Highlight key messages for students: their right to ask for help, the importance of self-care, and why it's important to speak up when responsibilities become too demanding.

After the activity

Remain open to continuing the conversation about caregiving.

Offer support to young caregivers who may need it (listening, referrals, special arrangements with the school, etc.).

Plan additional caregiving-related activities with your students (e.g., L'Appui's "Jeu des 7 familles" card game [in French]).

Incorporate tools and resources into your practice that let you better recognize and support young caregivers.

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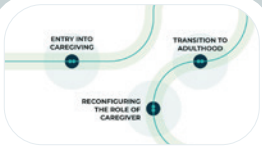
Looking for tools or information about young caregiving?

Read Kare – The Magazine for Young Caregivers

Consult the toolkit for healthcare providers



Explore the young caregivers trajectory

Discover Lou's Questionnaire, a tool to incorporate into your practice

To find organizations with a caregiving focus

Appui proches aidants

The resource directory

Proche aidance Québec

Member organizations (in French)

To find organizations that specialize in young caregivers

amiquébec
Alliés.es en santé mentale
Allies in mental health

List of resources – AMI-Quebec

To find organizations that support close ones of people with mental health issues

cap santé mentale

Credits

Authors/working committee members

Florence Potvin
Quebec Observatory on Caregiving

Margaux Reiss
Quebec Observatory on Caregiving

Janie Dussault
Quebec Observatory on Caregiving

Valérie Boucher
Regroupement des aidantes et aidants naturels de Montréal

Loriane Estienne
Proche aidance Québec

Oliver Fitzpatrick
AMI-Quebec

Maude Lupien-Montesinos
CAP santé mentale

Éliane Thouin
Psychoeducator

Marika Tessier
Proche aidance Québec

Lanna Check
Artist

Thibaud Marque
Graphics

Lesley Mc Cubbin
English translation

To see the **other publications** linked to this project or to read about the **process used** to put together this publication:

We welcome any comments or suggestions
you may have about this publication.
Email us at
info@observatoireprocheaidance.ca

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