



Son is inspiration to help find cure

By TONY CARLSON

When the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) called Maarika Paul to see if she would become involved with the group, she had just one thought: “If not me, then who?”

The call came just a few weeks after one of her sons — then 12-year-old Aleksí — was diagnosed with juvenile diabetes.

“We had been on vacation down south and Aleksí was really out of sorts — lethargic, no appetite, no energy to play on the beach,” says Paul, who is senior vice-president, corporate services with Bell Canada.

“The day we got home, my mother took one look at him and said we had to take him to hospital — now.”

Within a few hours, the medical team at Montreal Children’s Hospital had confirmed the news.

“We knew a fair bit about the disease because my father had type 2 diabetes for years. But it was still a shock because Aleksí was so young and we knew how it had affected my father’s life,” says Paul, a chartered accountant and chartered business valuator. “We didn’t want to alarm Aleksí, but as it turned out, I was the only one who was brought to tears. Everyone, including my son, reminded me that you have to face things in life.”

So when the JDRF phoned, her answer was yes.

“I had a very personal reason to do what I could to help find a cure,” she says now, four years after her son’s initial diagnosis.

“I also knew from years of coaching athletics that a lot of stuff just doesn’t happen if people don’t get involved. I also recognized that I have professional and management skills that might be very useful to an organization like the JDRF.”

Those skills are considerable. George Cope, Bell’s CEO and president, calls her a “go-to” executive.

“Her ability to motivate teams, her unmatched communications abilities and her overall business acumen make Maarika an exceptional executive, leader and mentor.”

That and her commitment soon made a mark on the work of the JDRF. Paul focused on the foundation’s Ride for a Cure.

“In the first year I thought I could probably drum up five or six teams of Bell people to enter,” Paul remembers with a smile.

“As it turned out, my colleagues really got on the bandwagon, so to speak, and we had



The Bell team of, from left, Rae Borsellino, Paule Desautels, Valérie Beaudin, François Lajeunesse and Maarika Paul participated in the 2009 Montreal Ride for Diabetes on September 11. With them is Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation ambassador Audrey Ann, 12, right, who has had diabetes since age eight. Paul helped raise \$140,000 for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation.

close to 45 teams.”

As a result, the company won the organization’s Leaps and Bounds Award in Paul’s first year. But that was only a start. The next year, 2006, she was named philanthropist of the year by the JDRF for her significant fundraising efforts.

This year, as one of three executive committee members, Paul is leading an extensive volunteer team with a goal of

organization to benefit from Paul’s involvement. She is also a member of the Montreal Children’s Hospital Foundation board where Aleksí receives treatment.

“Maarika’s involvement takes many forms,” says Louise Dery-Goldberg, president of the hospital’s foundation.

“Her expertise and sense of ethics are highly prized in her work as a member of the board. She is also a strong link between

support the performing arts.

An active member of the board of directors of Canadian Women in Communications, Paul is also executive sponsor of the Women@Bell network of 2,500 women managers. In that role, she is a resource for numerous younger women who are leaders across the company.

She also finds time, as part of Bell’s Athlete and Executive Mentoring program, to advise

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Maarika Paul, CA-CBV

raising \$1 million. And next year she will take her place on the advisory board for the Quebec chapter of the foundation.

“Maarika’s devotion to her son, Aleksí, and her commitment to the foundation are unparalleled,” says Denis Lalonde, regional director for the JDRF in Montreal.

“She has worked selflessly to raise funds for diabetes research by chairing the corporate committee of the annual Ride for Diabetes. With her help, the Ride for Diabetes has raised over \$2.8 million. She is a true asset to our cause.”

The JDRF is not the only

us and Bell, which has been our partner for many years. And as a parent of one of our patients, she never hesitates to be a strong voice in support of the quality of services the hospital provides.”

Long a champion of Centraide (United Way), this year Maarika rejoined the organization’s communications executive committee in Montreal where she has helped to raise funds for more than 360 community groups over the last five years.

This year, too, she was a member of the national committee for the 2009 Governor General’s Performing Arts Awards which raises funds to

Clara Hughes, the multiple Olympic medal-winning cyclist and speed skater.

The program helps elite athletes successfully transition from careers in sport to careers in business by giving them access to Bell’s extensive development resources.

“We talk about big issues but often it’s the small bits of advice I can give that I think help someone like Clara,” Paul says. “For instance, she is so popular that everyone wants to interview her. Having worked for senior executives who are always in demand, I was able to tell Clara that it’s all right to say no, and give her some tips on how to do it nicely.”

Giving back to the community has always been a given for Paul. The question has been how to choose among so many worthwhile causes.

“I think everyone recognizes how important it is — when you are as blessed as we are — to give back something,” she says. “But to really make a contribution — and to have fun doing it — it’s best to pick a cause that means something to us on a personal level. Without that connection, it can be difficult to have the passion that these organizations need.”

The rewards are many for Paul, both as a professional and as a person.

“There is no question it does good things for Bell to have people out volunteering for community organizations that they believe in, even if those good things are hard to measure on a traditional balance sheet.

“Just as important, for me as an individual and a mother, I have come to know so many different people from so many different walks of life because of my involvement,” Paul says.

“You develop deeper bonds with people you would never ordinarily run across — including many colleagues within Bell who are facing the same challenges. That not only provides resources for me to learn from, it also gives me a very strong sense of what connects us as human beings.”

She also praises her company and co-workers for helping to contribute to the community.

“I am fortunate to work in a corporation in which community service and responsibility is part of the culture. We do contribute more than \$20 million a year to non-profit organizations, but our commitment to community goes well beyond writing cheques. We actively encourage Bell team members to lend their skills and energy to non-profit organizations that are meaningful to them.”

Prior to joining Bell in 1994, Paul worked for KPMG and was the first female manager in the company’s corporate finance practice when it was established in Montreal.



PAUL