

OISE's Atkinson Centre Post-Doc Launches Book for Cardiac Charity at OISE

Words by: Jennifer O'Reilly



Picture by: Maja Zychowska

For Emis Akbari, a post-doc at OISE's Atkinson Centre, writing a children's book was never a career aspiration.

Reconnecting with childhood friends Brian and Laura Veloso via Facebook, she learned that their third child Owen, now six, had been born with Hypoplastic Left Heart Syndrome (HLHS), a rare and complex congenital heart defect in which the left side of the heart is critically underdeveloped, forcing the right side to overcompensate. Advances in surgical techniques have dramatically increased the survival rate of infants born with HLHS, which prior to the 1980's, was 0%.

Taking inspiration from Robert Munsch's book 'Love You Forever', Emis decided to write a children's book about Owen, the Veloso family and the challenges they have faced. Named after the protagonist Owen, 'The Mighty O!' details the run up to the little boy's ultimate wish of becoming a fireman.

Enlisting the help of illustrator and friend, Arzu Abbasova, work began on the project two years ago with the intention of donating all proceeds to causes important to the Veloso family as well as providing emotional support to readers who may be experiencing similar struggles. For Akbari, "a book is timeless. We all cherish our favourite stories which both stay with us and which we pass on. When we read a book, we go on a journey, delving into worlds and experiences we otherwise would not have felt or come close to understanding."

Funded by QUBE | INC, a Toronto based contracting company run by Akbari's husband Alex, and in partnership with Cardiac Kids, a volunteer group established in 2000 to raise funds for children who are suffering from congenital heart disease, the book launch of 'The Mighty O!' will take place at OISE on Friday, October 24th.

Guests at the book launch will include researchers in the area of child development from OISE and elsewhere, members of the City of Toronto, representatives from Sick Kids Foundation and Make-A-Wish Foundation Canada, as well as 'cardiologists, thoracic surgeons and nurses who are responsible for the miracles we see everyday at SickKids,' according to Akbari.

Emis's inaugural leap into the world of writing children's books has taught her not only about the intricacies of publishing but about the power of people. "What has been most profound is experiencing the invaluable help of strangers and working

together toward such an important cause. I have learned through watching the Velosos on this journey the immense power of family, friendship and neighbors and the amazing things that can happen when people come together.”

100% of the proceeds of ‘The Mighty O!’ will go to Make-A-Wish Foundation Canada and The Labatt Family Cardiac Centre at The Hospital for Sick Children. The book will be available for purchase in the coming weeks at:

<https://www.facebook.com/TheMighyO>

For more information about Arzu Abbasova and to view her work visit:

<http://arzuism.com/>

For more information about Cardiac Kids and OISE’s Atkinson Centre see:

<http://www.cardiackids.ca/>

<http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/atkinson/>