

Community leaders honoured

The Quebec Community Groups Network has named recipients of its annual awards. Winners of the 11th Victor and Sheila Goldbloom Distinguished Community Service Award were Joan Fraser, Josh Freed, Martin Murphy and, of the Young Quebecers Leading the Way Award, Joshua Arless.

Senator Joan Fraser was cited for her 33-years as an eloquent journalist, most notably at *The Montreal Gazette*, and as Canadian senator, a strong proponent of minority language rights. Since her retirement, she has continued her support of the English-speaking community through defense of Montreal's English school boards.

Josh Freed, humourist, author and film-maker, was cited for his success in celebrating the daily challenges that dog English-language life in Quebec. Marked by wit and warmth, his perceptive insights resonate beyond the English-speaking community, bringing Quebecers of all origins together.

Martin Murphy, long-time advocate for social justice, was cited for his advancement of community causes such as better conditions for teachers, greater access in English to health and social services and more equitable funding for English-speaking organizations. He has played a particular role in promoting the development and vitality of smaller, fragile, English-speaking communities in Quebec.

Joshua Arless was cited for his outstanding political and social involvement in the community. A gay activist, he has made strong representation for LGBTQ rights in the education system.

Nursing home a first

The province's first long-term care facility on First Nations territory will open next year for the Huron-Wendat people at Wendake, outside Quebec City. It will be part of a comprehensive healthcare complex that will eventually include an intermediate residence for seniors and community housing.

Broadening base for Blacks

A new source of social services assistance is now available for the Black community on the West Island. The African Canadian Development and Prevention Network (acdpn), active for the past 11 years in west-central Montreal, has opened a western satellite office to accommodate the growing needs of that vulnerable population.

"The highest number of Quebec's English-speaking Blacks live on the West Island," explains **Tania Callender**, acdpn executive director. "That territory has the reputation of being affluent, but there are pockets of poverty throughout the region, and especially among Blacks. They face economic and linguistic challenges that often create psycho-social problems. By being there, on the ground, we hope to make a difference."

The recent influx of unilingual immigrants from Nigeria has added to the mix. "These people are poor, with no knowledge of French or their new culture," says Callender. "Their kids are forced to go to French schools, making the possibility for educational success fragile. So we've expanded our mandate: predominantly focused on health, we've added education and early childhood development, for the 0-to-5 and 6-to-12 populations."

Acdpn already had a presence on the West Island through its involvement with youth protection, which falls under the jurisdiction of Batshaw Youth and Family Services within the West Island health authority. "Batshaw is absolutely one of our key partners," says Callender. "They refer Black families to us so that they get cultural support, and can be fast tracked through the public system. Or sometimes problem cases can be handled by the community itself. It's been an extraordinary collaboration.

"Our first job now," says Callender, "is outreach. We must be known by frontline service providers to work on adapting available services for the Black community. And the community needs to be aware of us. The families we've met so far were elated to have someone to turn to for aid and advice."

Help and hope for homeless

After many months of uncertainty – and tragedy – the homeless Indigenous people who congregate around the Cabot Square region in downtown Montreal will have access to a new, and welcome, wellness centre. Housed in a building at the corner of Atwater and St. Catherine Streets, it is called Resilience Montreal.

The need was pressing. The mostly Inuit homeless population in the region lost a longtime resource when the local church housing a popular drop-in centre closed last Spring. Following that loss, their situation reached a critical state. The area became increasingly unsafe as their support network unraveled which, in turn, led to an increase in violence and need for medical attention. Fourteen deaths among the Indigenous population were recorded during that time.

Then, led by **Nakuset**, executive director of the Native Women's Shelter in Montreal, and **Sheila Woodhouse**, executive director of Nazareth Community, the movement to establish a permanent centre mushroomed to receive the backing of the city and the province, as well as other community groups. The centre will accept men and women and will provide access to hygiene facilities, food and social services, and drug and alcohol counselling. It will operate every day between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m.

Chez Doris expands

At the same time, Chez Doris, for 43 years a day centre in Shaughnessy Village for vulnerable women, has received permission to open a second shelter offering 22 emergency beds at night for homeless women. A generous benefactor provided \$one million to purchase a stone house nearby.

Up to 100 women a day rely on Chez Doris for a vast range of services: meals, showers, health and mental health counselling and referrals, and educational and recreational activities. Now those most in need will also have a place to sleep.

One voice emerging

Isolated English-speaking seniors in Montreal can face a myriad of obstacles in coping with everyday life, especially those concerning health and social issues. A group of seniors' organizations, called One Voice, is now working together to find solutions to some of those problems.

"We're actually a mutual help group," explains **Judy Wong**, executive director of Catholic Action Montreal, who facilitates the group's bi-monthly meetings. "Directors and volunteers from 12 senior centres meet to exchange best practices, and to share experience and ideas for solutions. In total, they're looking out for some 1500 seniors."

There is always a learning component on the agenda. "There have been training sessions for the staff of our centres to develop listening skills to better reach seniors," says Wong. "A mime play we saw on elder abuse was then brought to perform at centres to inform seniors of their rights and to open up dialogue on the subject. Another resilience training model will focus on helping seniors to rebuild self-confidence and recover quickly from difficulties. We had a grant writer in to help organizations with core-funding issues. We've also been able to set up a bus shuttle service to take seniors on outings."

Some general issues have emerged that One Voice will be considering: what can be done to make life easier for unilingual anglophones and allophones in accessing the healthcare system; the lack of accessibility to banking for those with mobility problems; availability of grocery delivery service; problems faced by English-speaking seniors placed in mostly French residences in dealing with staff.

"The number of isolated anglophone seniors is growing all the time," says Wong, "as are their needs. We must heighten awareness of this issue among policy makers. For example, when the province held public meetings recently on creating senior-friendly cities, not one English group was on its invitation list. We're going to work on that."

Autistic youth get attention

A long-awaited health service for autistic English-speaking youth has opened in the East End. Following extended intervention by REISA, the regional East End English-speaking network, the Montreal North regional health authority has assigned a doctor to hold two clinics a week at the Centre of Dreams and Hopes.

This centre serves anglophones with intellectual and/or physical disabilities from all over the city, but because the health system dictates that patients be classified for healthcare according to postal code, the first cohort of autistic patients must be residents of Montreal North. REISA, however, is negotiating with the Montreal East health authority to provide similar medical access to youth from that territory also. “It’s a model that could be adopted by other regions, too,” says **Fatiha Gatra Guimiri**, REISA executive director. “We’re happy to export the idea.”

New profile for Nazareth

Nazareth House, established close to 60 years ago in downtown Montreal to care for destitute and abandoned men, broadened its reach in 2015 to provide a similar accommodation for women in Anne’s House nearby. Now known collectively as the Nazareth Community, this key organization is expanding its scope to help other needy Montrealers.

“We’ve been very much involved with establishing the new Indigenous wellness centre at Cabot Square,” says **Sheila Woodhouse**, executive director. “That’s a very significant accomplishment. We’ve also started looking into setting up a new residence, this time for homeless youth. Kids coming out of foster care at 18 years old so often find themselves abandoned by the system; the number of young people living on the street is constantly growing. We want to help them. And, with that generational change in mind, we’ve taken another new step by appointing three young people to our board. They are technically savvy and caring and give us great hope for the future of Nazareth.”

Gambling to excess

During the past seven years, the Information and Referral Centre of Greater Montreal program has been operating a 24/7 help line for addicted gamblers, but has not heard from many English-speaking callers. “We have everything we need to offer this service in English,” says **Nancy Rochas**, coordinator of the Excessive Gamblers Tele-counseling Program. “And now, as well as offering individual attention, we’ll be developing a support program for family members, or anyone concerned with a problem gambler.”

This help line is a personalized telephone support service with seven specially trained counsellors available for an immediate emergency and for participation in a six-part telephone counselling program. “Video lotteries are the chief source of gambling excess that we deal with,” explains Rochas. “They’re so accessible, and frequent exposure frequently leads to a habit that gets out of control and becomes an addiction, particularly for emotionally vulnerable people living through a difficult situation. Their level of psychological distress is very high when they call us.” The help line number is 514 527 0140.

Aid for aging homeless

A new project designed to resolve housing issues for Canada’s most vulnerable citizens is focusing first at the growing number of older adults experiencing homelessness. It is part of a \$13.9 million five-year partnership of Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council that will lead to development of a national housing strategy.

Researchers from McGill School of Social Work led a preliminary investigation into existing and potential housing options in this city. “We invited people who serve the homeless population as well as their clients to hear their perceptions,” says **Tamara Sussman**, lead researcher. “The next phase is to build a strong case for what action to take locally.”

Money for mental health

Quebec Health Minister **Danielle McCann** has announced that a five-year action plan for mental health will be tabled in the Spring. At the same time, Minister for Seniors and Informal Caregivers **Marguerite Blais** has declared that in preparing a new government program of aid to caregivers, one chapter will be specifically devoted to mental health.

Canada's children lacking

UNICEF's recent report on child wellbeing throughout the world places Canada 25th among the world's 41 developed nations. Among its indicators of wellbeing, UNICEF reports that only 55 percent of Canadian children report high levels of life satisfaction; less than half feel positive about school; one in three experiences weekly symptoms of mental stress and one in four is lonely; and one-quarter of children studied report being regularly bullied.

Volunteer awards available

The Volunteer Bureau of Montreal is calling for nominations for its 2020 annual recognition awards. There are six categories of awards: volunteer group, volunteer manager, exceptional individual volunteer, business volunteer program, public personality, volunteer professional. Deadline for nominations is February 2. For information: gala.cabm.net.

Help for fathers

CCS (Collective Community Services) is designing a new program for English-speaking fathers in Montreal. According to a recent study by the Regroupement pour la Valorisation de la Paternité, anglophone fathers experience more stress and face more challenges in adjusting to life as a father. The study claims that nearly three-quarters of English-speaking fathers feel that available public services do not reflect their needs. For information: 514 503 1552.

In brief

Deborah Radcliffe-Branch has been appointed manager, Child and Family Services, at CCS (Collective Community Services).

Michael Udy has been appointed director of Access to Health and Social Services for the Quebec Community Groups Network.

AMI-Quebec is holding a special workshop covering a wide spectrum of mental illnesses – depression, hoarding, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and more – on November 28. Facilitated by doctors in McGill's Psychiatry postgraduate program, the workshop will be held at 5800 Décarie Blvd. from 6 to 8 p.m. Registration is required: 514 486 1448.

AMI-Quebec will start a new eight-week support group for family caregivers beginning January 27. For information: 514 486 1448.

L'appui pour les proches aidants d'aînés is a non-profit organization that provides a directory of resources available to elder caregivers by region, as well as a free, confidential and professional phone consultation service. For assistance: 1 855 852 7784.

Canada's Food Guide is now available in 26 languages. For information: Canada.ca/foodguide.

The Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) has produced a study on the socio-demographic situation of Quebec children aged 0-to-5 years and their families. It also includes comparison between the French majority and English-speaking minority populations. Available at: chssn.org.

The story of Red Feather is available online at <http://redfeathermontreal.ca>.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309.

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