

English institutions in jeopardy

The major transformation planned for Quebec's health and social services network will have a major impact on the future of many of the province's venerable anglophone institutions. Dissolution of their volunteer boards and corporations means that governance and management of those institutions by the community that built them could be lost.

The legislation introducing the government's sweeping new reforms was mandated, by closure, in December 2003. Bill 25, as it is known, merges hospitals, CLSCs and long-term care facilities into local health and social service networks that will be responsible for providing all primary and secondary care. Each network will have a single board of directors; individual boards of merged institutions will be abolished. And their institution's assets and personnel will be merged into the new entity.

Breaking the tradition

Quebec's English-speaking institutions owe their long history to the dedicated donors and volunteers who built and have maintained them over many generations. So reaction to the proposed reorganization has been swift and strong:

"Merging Quebec City's anglophone institutions into a francophone network strikes at the heart and soul of our community, and poses a threat to its long-term survival." "St. Mary's Hospital Centre strongly opposes its fusion into a local authority... when a cultural community no longer identifies with its institutions, there is an inevitable erosion of its sense of belonging". The Jewish Public Establishments Commission insists that "community boards of directors are essential" and that the facilities built by its community "should remain in community hands". Similar concerns are being expressed by the Italian and Chinese communities.

And, while the legislation does assert that access to services in English will be maintained, there is also concern about the future status of institutions now designated bilingual. When such an institution

is integrated into the larger network board as just one participant among many others, it becomes vulnerable to the new board's willingness to maintain that designation. Its ultimate fate would be left to the discretion of the sitting Minister.

What is happening in Montreal?

New regional Agencies, which have replaced the regional boards of health and social services, are responsible for developing and implementing the reformation. The Montreal Agency is proposing the establishment of 12 local networks in this region. Because of the dense population and multiplicity of institutions in the west-central area of the Island, two versions of network models are being studied for this area, each representing a major realignment of anglophone establishments and healthcare delivery.

The five specialized teaching hospitals in the region will not be merged into local networks, but will interact with other healthcare agencies through contractual service agreements. St Mary's asserts that its eligibility as a teaching hospital should exempt it from integration into a network. The Minister has indicated the possibility of considering exemptions, but only after reorganization has been completed and, again, this will be at his discretion.

There is agreement on the need for change

The Ministry's rationale for reorganization is not disputed. It is aiming for continuity and quality of care, assured access to services at the right place at the right time, administrative efficiency. It is the long-term cost to anglophone tradition that will be argued by community representatives at upcoming public consultations.

These include: a series of town hall meetings to be held in each new "territory" between March 24 and April 8; public hearings on March 29, 30, 31; and closed meetings with designated interest groups. The Agency must present its recommendations to the Minister by April 30; the reorganization will be made law before the National Assembly rises in June, at which time its implementation will begin. For further information: www.msss.gouv.qc.ca.

Old Mission to get new mission

The arrival of a new executive director could spell a new beginning for the Old Brewery Mission. **James Hughes**, who assumed his duties in February, is making plans to broaden the mandate of the 115-year old institution, to take it beyond its traditional role as an emergency shelter.

“This is a big place now,” says Hughes. “We run four facilities, a cold-weather annex, a warehouse and a camp. In January alone, we served over 34,000 meals and filled our beds over 16,000 times. We, along with our sister organizations and the City, are doing a good job of providing emergency services to Montreal’s itinerant population. But I believe that much more can be done.”

Such as counselling, intervention and social integration. “Unfortunately, homelessness is a permanent feature of our society,” says Hughes, “and some of our clients don’t want any more than a meal and a bed. There are many, however, who could be helped into leading more autonomous lives. The average age of our new male clients has dropped to 34.5 years; that of the women, 36 years. What can we do to help these relatively young people move on with their lives?”

Hughes and his team have already begun exploring what new services the Mission alone, and in partnership with other organizations and public agencies, could provide to make this happen. At the same time, the new director is organizing a more programmed approach to operation of the Mission.

“There is a strong consensus among staff and board members that it’s time to put in place the professional management and planning tools needed to realize our new goals,” Hughes explains. “And to accommodate a new reality: our employees are now unionized. For them, for the administrative staff, and for the stability of the organization, we must put in place efficient human resources practice and policies. It all means change, but I’m very positive that it will pay off both in the short and long term.”

A bank for nonprofits?

If all goes as planned, the volunteer sector will have its own bank next year. **Tim Brodhead**, president of The J.W. McConnell Family Foundation, is involved with an initiative to set up a fully-fledged financial institution to service nonprofit organizations. Consultations to assess the sector’s willingness to use the “community bank” have already begun; and business plans are being prepared for seeking regulatory approvals.

“Nonprofits know only too well how difficult it is to obtain financing for their operations,” says Brodhead. “They don’t have access to the same financial instruments as small businesses. And even though they generate a significant amount of economic activity across the country, it’s not a market that interests the larger banks.”

The new bank, which could operate along the same lines as institutions like ING, would provide organizations with many advantages they can’t enjoy now, such as a ready cash flow, the potential to borrow against future projects, the ability to take out mortgages on the buildings they own. “The lending criteria will be no less rigorous than that of other banks,” Brodhead affirms, “but there is certainly no evidence that charities are any more risky than other ventures.” Start up is scheduled for early 2005.

Advisory committee gets to work

After an absence of two years, the provincial advisory committee for accessibility to English-language services is back on the job. Their predecessors having resigned in protest against “muzzling” by the previous government, the new members have two major issues to tackle.

“We’re going to be very busy,” affirms **Marjorie Goodfellow**, committee chair. “We’ll be reviewing all the proposals submitted for the new health networks. And we’ll be reviewing the framework for, and the contents of, all the new access plans that must be drawn up across the province.”

VON expands children's service

VON Montreal is broadening its program of providing respite care for families of chronically ill children. Developed with The Montreal Children's Hospital in a recently-completely pilot project, this service is now also being made available through CLSCs and other institutions. It is designed for children of preschool age.

"Basically, we provide all the home care that falls within the child's regular routine," explains **Marla Berard**, executive director. "As well as bathing and hygiene, exercise, feeding and play activities, our specially trained nursing aides will also help the caregiver administer treatments and medications."

The service is offered, at no charge, for six hours a week. To ensure continuity – and confidence – the same aide is assigned to the family for the duration of care. "Response has been very positive," says Berard. "We've found that both child and caregiver come to think of their aide as a member of the family." For further information: 514 866 6801.

Women's Y helps women find work

The Women's Y is offering a new employability service to young women. The Jump Start Program is designed for women between the ages of 17 and 30 who are unemployed, underemployed, without work experience or without a diploma.

The Women's Y has been involved in other job preparation programs, but this one was designed to meet a new need. "There is a growing number of young women who are having particular difficulties in finding a job," explains **Jacinthe Roy**, program coordinator. "Our participants will receive individual counselling as well as group support. The Jump Start team will help them to identify their strengths and interests, and to develop the tools necessary for an effective job search, such as a professional c.v. and job interview techniques. And they'll be coached on how to present themselves to potential employers." For further information: 514 866 9941, local 416.

Caregiver support network a first

A city-wide teleconferencing link-up will soon open new avenues of information and support for caregivers. Sponsored by the Foundation for Vital Aging, the three-year project is being managed by the CLSC René-Cassin. No similar initiative on this scale has ever been attempted in Quebec.

"It's been estimated that the close to three million Canadians providing home care to family members are saving this country at least \$5 billion a year," says **Mark Stolow**, manager of the project. "And they're just the ones we know about. Many more are invisible because they've not identified themselves as caregivers. So they don't have equitable access to community resources. This project aims to address that problem."

A major bilingual radio campaign will be launched in August to both promote the project and to help raise public awareness of caregiving issues. Responding caregivers will be grouped for participation in mini-conference calls according to areas of interest, demographics or special issues. Calls will be facilitated by volunteer caregivers and trained professionals who can provide information on caregiving resources. Contacts are "open-ended" in that participants can hook up any number of times and can also continue their dialogue with other participants outside the project. For further information: 514 488 9163, local 1474.

Budding Black filmmakers

A group of young Black Montrealers is presently filming a documentary that examines issues of social change and youth activism here and in New York Black communities. Chosen for their artistic talent, the youth received special training from the National Film Board of Canada. The project was designed both to provide a growing experience for the young filmmakers, and also to produce a film that could be screened in schools to stimulate discussion. For further information: **Sharon Springer**, director, Black Community Resource Centre 514 342 2247.

MUHC report delayed

The Johnson/Mulrone committee, appointed to review in detail the plans for Montreal's two proposed mega-hospitals, has been granted a delay in tabling its report, to April 16. The committee's analysis was originally scheduled for February.

Political changes affect sector

Two new federal government departments have been created out of the old Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC), changes that have implications for the voluntary sector. One is the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development; the other is the Department of Social Development (DSD).

DSD has taken over the Voluntary Sector Affairs Directorate and responsibility for most of the voluntary sector (from the Department of Canadian Heritage). The Canadian Volunteerism Initiative remains with Canadian Heritage.

Government pledges support

The voluntary sector and the millions of Canadian volunteers are essential contributors to the quality, fairness and vitality of our communities. The Government will continue to advance the Voluntary Sector Initiative, to strengthen the capacity and voice of philanthropic and charitable organizations and to mobilize volunteers. *Speech from the Throne*, February 2, 2004.

What's in a name?

There is a movement afoot to change the term "voluntary" sector. This designation was formally adopted in 1999, with publication of the Broadbent Report on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector, but studies indicate that it is misunderstood by the general public. Pundits now feel that "community" sector better describes the organizations and people who work in this area.

In brief

Manny Batshaw has received the Order of Canada.

Carlos Casteneda has been appointed manager of the Good Shepherd Community Centre.

Dr. **Victor Goldbloom** has been named to the board of directors of the new *Agence de développement de réseaux locaux de services de santé et de services sociaux de Montréal*.

Marjorie Goodfellow was elected president of the provincial advisory committee on access to English-language services.

Hazel Harrington has been honoured by VON Canada for her 66 years of volunteer service.

Ron McNeil has been appointed secretary of the provincial advisory committee on access to English-language services.

Dr. **Arthur Porter** has been appointed director general and CEO of the MUHC.

The Council on Palliative Care is holding a workshop on "Quality of Life at the End of Life" on March 23. For information: 514 499 0345.

Volunteer Week runs from April 18 to 24, under the theme "Play your Part".

The Sam Solomon Trust Fund for Underprivileged Children is accepting proposals for project funding. For information: 514 345 2645, ext. 3050.

The government is calling for nominations for its annual "*Hommage bénévolat-Québec*" awards. Both individuals and organizations are eligible. For information: 1 800 577 2844.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309.

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