

It's time to vote

An important opportunity for English-speaking Quebecers to participate in the province's health and social services system is coming up on October 23. That is the day community representatives will be elected to the boards of directors of all Quebec's public health institutions.

"It's really crucial that anglophones cast their vote," affirms **Ron MacNeil**, secretary for the provincial committee that advises the government on accessibility to English-language services. "But it's essential that they run for office. We did invite community groups to nominate anglophone candidates, but there are few volunteers in Montreal so far. We'll be sending out another reminder."

Individuals do not have to wait to be asked: they can nominate themselves. Information on the procedure to be followed will appear in institutions' notices published in local newspapers. It can also be obtained from the regional health and social services Agency. Deadline for nominations is September 25.

(The Ministry has delayed enforcement of its legislation obligating each healthcare institution to set up a services quality/user complaints committee until after the election. Committee members are to be selected from the new boards of directors.)

Access programs on the way

The programs ensuring access to English-language health and social services in Quebec are on their way to completion. Much of the planning and programming of services previously done at the regional level has now been transferred to local CSSSs. It is each regional Agency, however, that has responsibility for developing the access programs.

One of the criteria for approval of the new access programs is consultation with anglophone community organizations, to be held this fall. The Agencies must submit their final recommendations to the Ministry by the end of January 2007.

CSSS to run major Info-Santé centre

The CSSS de la Montagne has been given the mandate to organize a major new Info-Santé call centre for the Montreal region. The largest of 16 such centres in the province, this new facility will be a key source of health information for English-speaking callers. The CSSS, which serves the central west area of the city, will ensure that the service is readily accessible to anglophones in Montreal as well as to all other regions of the province.

"It is a big project," says **Marc Sougavinski**, executive director of the CSSS, "one that we're very pleased to take on. We'll have up to 145 nurse-responders on staff – all those currently in CLSCs will be transferred, and we're recruiting more – to provide 24/7 service. The goal is to have at least 90 per cent of all calls answered within 30 seconds. That should help keep many people out of the ER. And it's a major improvement for English-speaking callers, particularly those from outside Montreal."

The reorganized Info-Santé system, which will be given a special three-digit telephone number, is scheduled to be up and running early next year. It will be joined by a new call-in service, Info-Social, which will respond to queries on social services.

Centraide kicks off campaign

Centraide of Greater Montreal has launched its 38th annual fund-raising campaign under the theme Give. So we can do even more. This year the issues of mental health and assistance to families will be added to school dropout, isolated seniors, food insecurity and homelessness as topics of the campaign promotional material. An army of some 48,000 volunteers will be working until December 15 to reap yet another record return.

Last year's campaign garnered \$49.4 million to support 350 community-based agencies and joint projects. Centraide calculates that close to half a million needy Montrealers were assisted through these corporate and individual donations.

Focus on families of handicapped

A special conference on families of intellectually handicapped children will examine issues that affect their quality of life. Organized by the Taylor-Birks and Butters Foundations, the November 14 event is being hosted by the McGill Faculty of Education. It will bring together professionals, practitioners and anglophone parents from across the province.

The conference was the brainchild of **Ron Creary**, long associated with both foundations. "We see a real problem out there that hasn't been addressed," Creary affirms. "Changing dynamics in the social and medical fields are seriously affecting many families with mentally disabled children. We wanted to open up a discussion."

There are about 50,000 mentally handicapped Quebecers requiring social services all their lives. "That number has been much the same for the past 40 years," Creary says. "It should be going down, given the major advances in diagnostic tools, but the increase in cases of autism has had a major impact. That disorder has been getting government and institutional attention, while those with traditional handicaps, such as the mentally disabled, are no longer considered a priority."

A key concern for Creary is the dramatic change in the family itself. "When both parents of a disabled child are working," he says, "it can put a strain on the family that affects its quality of life. We're seeking a comprehensive approach on how these families can be better supported. This conference is a first step." The West Montreal Rehabilitation Centre and the Education Ministry are conference sponsors. For information: 514 363 3025, ext. 2201.

Foster opens outreach in the East End

Foster Pavilion has signed an agreement with the CSSS de Saint-Léonard et de Saint-Michel and the Montreal English School Board to provide East End anglophones with local rehabilitation services on substance abuse and problem gambling.

The Douglas celebrating its 125th

The Douglas Hospital in Verdun is 125 years old this year. Founded in 1881 by Alfred Perry and a group of Protestant clergy and other Montreal citizens, it was first named the Protestant Hospital for the Insane. This prestigious and progressive mental health institution was renamed the Douglas Hospital in 1965, after Dr. James Douglas, a pioneer in psychiatry, and his family, who were generous donors to the hospital.

Today the Douglas provides specialized care for 250 inpatients and some 9,000 outpatients. It boasts the second most extensive mental health research centre in Canada, with over 60 scientists and clinical researchers and 180 university students.

Catholics not selling

The new board of the Catholic Community Services Foundation has reversed its predecessor's decision to sell the downtown Catholic Centre. Future options for the building are being evaluated.

Mental health workshops to start

AMI-Québec is launching a series of telephone workshops on mental health. The program is aimed particularly at anglophones who live in areas where mental health services in English are lacking. Topics to be covered include anxiety, depression, obsession and early warning signs.

"We've been receiving so many calls for help from other parts of the province," says **Ella Amir**, AMI executive director. "The telephone workshop format developed by the Foundation for Vital Aging seemed like an excellent way to reach out to all those people needing assistance."

The free monthly workshops will be animated by AMI staff members, with guest professionals providing the expertise. The first session is scheduled for September 27. To register, or for further information: 1 866 396 AIDE.

Kids choir catching on

A small new choir of inner city youngsters has been receiving a lot of attention. Not yet a year old, the Every Kid Choir has sung for the Governor-General, at the McGill Faculty of Law refugee day, at a Mennonite Peace Festival. The children were brought together by the Montreal City Mission as part of its outreach activities.

“We’ve been running an inner city summer day camp for over 30 years,” explains **Paula Kline**, executive director of the Mission. “Parents have been asking us to set up after school activities as well. When we moved into St. James United Church last year, where there is a wonderful choir, the idea of setting up a children’s choir sprang to mind.”

The new choir is a multi-ethnic, inter-religious group of youngsters from five to 13 years old. They sing in several languages, including Hebrew and Arabic. Most of their songs are about faith and hope.

“Social justice is what the Mission is all about,” says Kline. “We’ve been helping the homeless, refugees, the downtrodden for nearly 100 years. Our work is based on Christian values, within an inter-faith context. The Every Kid Choir reflects that. They’re becoming little spokespeople for peace.” For further information: 514 844 9128, ext. 202.

Inuit sign language needs protection

The recent discovery that many of Canada’s deaf Inuit had developed their own sign language has raised much interest. **Jamie MacDougall**, director of the Canadian Deafness Research Institute, who brought the practice to light, is leading a major consultation in the North on Inuit sign languages (ISL). “There are as many sign languages as there are dialects in Inuktitut, the spoken language,” says MacDougall, “but there are significant similarities. Efforts have begun to have Inuktitut declared an official language. If ISL were protected in the same way, it could have a major impact on justice, education and employment in the North.”

Awareness of elderly abuse increasing

When the United Nations designated last June 15 as the first international elder abuse awareness day, its basic goal was to encourage local governments and community groups to do more to combat the problem. It has become a serious social issue, one that is receiving more and more attention in Quebec.

“Elder abuse has been recognized for around 15 years,” says **Francine Cytrynbaum**, social worker with the Elder Abuse Consultation Centre at the CLSC René-Cassin, CSSS Cavendish. “But there is still limited awareness of how widespread a problem it is, and what it is. Most people think first of physical violence, but psychological abuse and financial exploitation also figure in the equation.”

The CLSC has operated a province-wide Info-Abuse telephone line for 11 years. “We get nearly 900 calls a year,” explains Cytrynbaum, “half of which come from the seniors themselves. The majority of cases, however, are spotted within the healthcare system. So we’ve developed a special training program for frontline workers and a best practices package for the local healthcare centres.”

Taking the message directly to the public, the CLSC offers a series of presentations on elder abuse. “It’s about increasing awareness,” says Cytrynbaum. “A lot more people are concerned about that now. There’s been an explosion of community projects addressing the issue of elder abuse. And the government has spearheaded formation of multi-disciplinary teams to tackle the problem across the province. It’s all very positive.” For further information: 514 484 7878, ext. 1352.

MUHC moving ahead

The MUHC will be hiring the project manager, master architect and master engineer for its megahospital project this fall. With soil decontamination of the Glen site completed, construction of the first phase of the project, the Montreal Children’s Hospital, is scheduled for spring.

Teens top volunteers

The latest edition of the Canada Survey on Giving, Volunteering and Participating reveals that teenagers volunteer more than any other age group. Sixty-five percent of young Canadians between the ages of 15 and 19 do volunteer work in their communities. Teens also support different causes than other volunteers and have different motivations for becoming involved.

In total, almost 12 million Canadians volunteer at a rate of 168 hours a year. On a negative note, however, it turns out that the vast majority of volunteer hours are contributed by a very small group of Canadians. Only 11 percent of the population contributed 77 percent of all volunteer hours. That would indicate that Canada's 161,000 voluntary and non-profit organizations have a rather thin base of support.

Seeking senior-friendly cities

The Canadian Association of Retired People (CARP) has taken up the cause of making Canadian cities more amenable for senior citizens. CARP representatives have been across Canada this summer meeting with officials of major cities to discuss the issue. On September 8, CARP met with a member of Montreal's Executive Committee who expressed a keen interest in pursuing the issue.

Federal funding under review

A Blue Ribbon Task Force set up by the federal Treasury Board in June is examining how best to improve efficiency and accountability in the government's grants and contributions programs. It has been holding cross-country online consultations and will make its recommendations in December.

Imagine Canada presented a brief on behalf of the country's nonprofit sector. Among its suggestions is establishment of a new sector structure similar to the Business Development Bank and a new national foundation to serve as a federal funding instrument.

In brief

Monica Gaudet is the new executive director of the West Island Volunteer Bureau.

Ian Moodie was elected chair of the Taylor-Birks Foundation.

Patrick Rourke was elected president of the Catholic Community Services Foundation board.

Yves Sanssouci was elected chair of the board of Centraide of Greater Montreal.

AMI-Quebec will be holding its annual Depression Awareness Week October 1 to 7, under the theme It's worth talking about! Call 514 486 1448.

The provincial advisory committee on accessibility to English language healthcare services now has information space on the government Website under secrétariat à l'accès aux services en langue anglaise: www.msss.gouv.qc.ca .

The Douglas Hospital is running a series of "mini-psych" lectures for the general public on a range of topics concerning mental illness. The free six-week series begins on October 18. For further information: 514 761 6131, ext. 2717.

The 2006 Low-Beer Memorial Lecture on mental health sponsored by AMI-Quebec will take place on September 28. For information: 514 486 1448.

Designing a fundraising strategy is available online at: www.volunteer.ca/.../SFMFundraisingENG.pdf .

Recruiting and sustaining youth volunteers: a resource for organizations is available online at: www.volunteer.ca/.../cruit_book_eng_web.pdf .

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309

Legal deposit:
National Library of Canada ISSN 1709 092X
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec