

Where were the voters?

The voter turnout in the province's healthcare board elections in October set a rather dismal record. Province-wide, only 1.2 percent of the population participated in selecting candidates to represent them in healthcare institutions and agencies. But that number actually looks good compared with the 0.22 percent of Montrealers who went to the polls.

In his widely advertised invitation to citizens to participate in the elections, Health and Social Services Minister **Philippe Couillard** pointed out that "these representatives speak for you when the boards make decisions affecting a wide variety of services provided to the community". That message attracted only 195 voters (0.01 percent of those eligible) at St. Mary's Hospital, and 624 (0.04 percent) at the McGill University Health Centre.

At the newly formed CSSSs, those serving a sizeable number of the English-speaking population fared a bit better. The CSSS Dorval-Lachine-LaSalle led the way with 3,198, or three percent, of eligible voters. The CSSS Ouest-de-l'Île had 837 voters (0.55 percent); CSSS Cavendish, 362 (0.38 percent); CSSS de la Montagne, 398 (0.22 percent).

More, and better, publicity might have improved participation in these elections. But there is still another opportunity for anglophones to participate in the institutions that serve them. "Users' committees are another area where they should be present," says **Ron MacNeil**, secretary of the provincial access advisory committee. "Two committee members are designated to sit on the institutional boards. Current committees were named last spring, but their mandates vary, so openings will be coming up."

English services institutions named

The Quebec government has issued a new list of institutions designated to provide healthcare services in English to English-speakers – the first revision since 1989. This information can be consulted on the official Website: www.msss.gouv.qc.ca.

Foundation flourishing

The Foundation of Greater Montreal (FGM) has just received a major \$24 million gift to add to its Community Fund. It comes from an anonymous donor who wanted to contribute to his city in a meaningful and lasting way. Through the FGM, he was able to create his own endowment fund to do so.

"This is a 'donor-advised' fund," says **Kathleen Weil**, FGM president and CEO. "The donor will select the projects he wants to support, while the Foundation handles all the administrative responsibilities."

"It's really a gift to Montreal," Weil affirms, "because it's not going to just one organization. It's going to benefit many of the City's charitable organizations for years to come. It's a wonderful gesture and a striking example of philanthropy."

It is the largest gift ever received by the seven-year-old Foundation, and one of the largest given to a Canadian community foundation. This donation, and other endowments received this year, have boosted the FGM's total assets to over \$70 million.

New Montreal profile to stimulate giving

The FGM has just released a document it hopes will further the cause of philanthropy in Montreal. Vital Signs is an overview of those factors that influence the well being of the community. It shows Montreal's status according to a wide range of social indicators, including health, housing, culture, employment, education and the environment.

"Vital Signs doesn't answer questions," says Weil, "it raises them. We want it to stimulate debate and discussion about what is going well and what is not going well in our society, and what issues we should be focusing on. The main purpose of a document like this is to guide donors who have endowment funds or people who would like to get involved in having an impact on their community through philanthropy. It's the most important initiative we've ever undertaken."

League leaves the scene

Faced with declining numbers and maturing members, the Junior League of Montreal has decided to disband. The 94-year-old volunteer group has turned its assets over to the Foundation of Greater Montreal and given its extensive archives to the McCord Museum. Its legacy to the English-speaking community of Montreal is reflected in the wide range of social welfare activities that League volunteers developed and served.

The oldest in Canada – the first Junior League was founded in New York City in 1907 – the Montreal League was formed in 1912 by a group of debutantes interested in finding “useful” ways to spend their time. Since then, over 2700 members have participated in League activities.

“It was called a ‘junior’ League because at 40 years of age, members ceased having a vote,” explains **Andrea Ritchie**, the League’s last president. “The idea was that then they would take on other leadership roles in the community. In the meantime younger members were given some very intensive preparatory training in community action, public speaking, chairing meetings, and so on.”

Those talents were put to good use over the years: in the League’s many recreational, educational and cultural activities for underprivileged children; in its health promotion projects for young and old, in its partnerships with other organizations on community projects. A member of the early Montreal Council of Social Agencies, the League sponsored the launch of several organizations that later became part of the Red Feather family of social service agencies.

League volunteers first started working in settlement houses and food banks in the poorer districts of Montreal. From 1912 to 1947 they were responsible for the Griffintown Boys Club. In 1932, they started the Rosemount Community Centre which, while providing recreational and educational activities for the unemployed, was an early demonstration of how schools could

serve the community after regular school hours. Their longest running project was the Junior League Camp for Girls in the Laurentians, which hosted over 12,000 under-privileged children from 1922 to 1965. Children also benefited from the League’s many and diverse cultural and educational programs.

The League did not hold on to projects. Its philosophy was to identify a social need, then develop and fund a project to address it. Once up and running, it was turned over to the community.

Many of those early ventures are still in operation. For example, in 1937 the League initiated and funded the first volunteer bureau in Canada, now the Volunteer Bureau of Montreal. Its funding led to the founding of the Montreal Oral School for the Deaf and St. Andrew’s Youth Centre, now the Park Extension Youth Organization. The Garderie Villeneuve, a bilingual day nursery for immigrant children it operated until 1974, is still running.

There were many health-related projects. The League set up and ran a canteen and library in the first Montreal General Hospital; a chronic geriatric care service at the Royal Victoria Hospital; play therapy and speech clinics at the Montreal Children’s Hospital – all the first of their kind in Canada. It also sponsored a poison prevention campaign for children, published a guide to Montreal for the disabled and a handbook for hemophilia patients.

The League raised most of its money for projects through a series of second-hand clothing shops, the first one starting in 1927. “All the money went to the community,” says Ritchie. “What’s left of it now, over \$50,000, becomes the new Junior League of Montreal Legacy Fund, to be managed by the Foundation of Greater Montreal. It will be part of the Foundation’s Community Fund, which supports innovative projects that alleviate needs in society. That’s always been our purpose, so we’re very pleased that our new Fund will continue our work.”

Important inroads for East End anglos

The four CSSSs now serving the East End region of Montreal are showing a serious commitment to providing services in English. Their directors have been meeting with community representatives who have researched the needs of anglophone Eastenders, and are consulting with them while developing their new English-access programs.

Homeless shelters form coalition

Representatives from 20 of Canada's largest homeless shelters met in Montreal in November to discuss common goals and future strategies. They decided to form a coalition to open up lines of communication and provide a platform to influence public policy on what is becoming a runaway social problem.

There are over 1200 homeless shelters across the country. The larger facilities share the challenge of serving a very diversified clientele requiring a very diversified program of interventions. Within serious financial constraints. The new coalition will launch a Website to share information on best practices, funding, staffing and other operational matters. And it will provide members with a much stronger voice.

"We all agree that our number one goal is to reduce homelessness," says James Hughes, executive director of the Old Brewery Mission, who organized the meeting. "We're profoundly against shelter life except as a transitional measure and steadfastly in favour of easing our clients back into the mainstream of society."

Mentally-ill seniors need attention

The Canadian Council of Retired People (CARP) has requested that a Senate Standing Committee be set up to examine the true impact that aging has on the individual, the community and society. CARP claims that particular attention should be paid to the aging of the mentally ill, "whose needs tend to be unique, yet are often unmet".

Bullies beware

CCS (Catholic Community Services) is starting a pilot project designed to reduce bullying among school children. Called "Peace-Out", the new program is being implemented at the James Lyng High School in St-Henri. If proven effective, it could well be extended to other schools that have already expressed interest

"Our approach is unique," explains Rania Abdul-Rahim, CCS community worker. "We've trained university student volunteers to conduct informal sessions with 'bystanders' – kids who might witness bullying – to increase their awareness of the problem, the role they play in it, and how that role may change. Because they're so much closer in age, but can still be role models for the younger students, we think they can make a lot of headway."

At the same time, Abdul-Rahim will be working with eight groups of students directly affected by bullying. "The high school students are from 11- to 18-years old, so the sessions are divided into two age groups. And because their bullying styles are quite different, there will be separate groups for boys and girls. The sessions, which will be held during school hours, will run from January to May." For further information: 514 937 5351, local 262.

Mission gets temporary reprieve

Faced with a debilitating tax burden, the Benedict Labre House, a charitable agency serving the poor, was in serious financial difficulty earlier this year. Source of the problem was a \$12,000 levy by the City of Montreal. During renovation of its facilities, the Mission had to cut back on its services, so the City withdrew its charitable status for that period.

"After some publicity, the City covered that cost by giving us a donation of \$12,000," says Katherleen Gray, executive director. "We're happy about that, but we're still paying 51 cents per \$100 evaluation of the property. So now we're asking to have the Mission exempted from all municipal taxes."

Red Cross to campaign

The Red Cross will begin its first fund-raising campaign among Quebec's civil servants in January. The Minister of employment and social solidarity has given permission for the Quebec division of the Red Cross, as well as Quebec Health Partners, to canvas public employees for contributions through payroll deductions. Until this decision, the province's Centraides were the only charitable organizations allowed to do so.

Quebec philanthropy dragging again

According to the most recent report from Statistics Canada, Canadians donated a record \$7.9 billion to charities in 2005. But Quebecers cannot boast about their contributions. The median donation from this province was \$120, again the lowest in the country. It was half the national median of \$240. Of all the provinces and territories, Nunavut ranked the highest, with \$400.

Quebecer's persistent neglect of their charities is causing some concern in higher places. The government has created a committee to examine why there is such a gap between this province and the rest of the country. The ultimate objective is to stimulate philanthropy here.

Free the Children now in Quebec

The children's rights advocacy group, Free the Children, has opened an office in Montreal. Called Enfants Entraide in Quebec, the group was founded in 1995 by **Craig Keilburger**, when he was a 12-year old student in Ontario. It has since grown into an internationally acclaimed organization that has built 400 schools in developing countries.

Its goal is to encourage youth to get involved in social issues, both locally and internationally. Now that its teaching and promotional materials are available in French, staffers will be touring the province to promote social engagement among Quebec youth. For more information: 514 773 8450.

In brief

A new English access advisory committee has been named for the Montreal region: **Sara Saber-Freedman**, president; **Line Bertrand**, **Zenon Bryniawsky**, **Dora Cesta**, **Estelle Hoppmeyer**, **Diane Sasson**, **Rosemary Steinberg**, **Jim Tremain**, **Germain Tullio**, and **Michael Udy**.

Linton Garner is community development agent for the Community Learning Centres project within the Ministry of education, sports and leisure.

Judy Martin was elected president of the board of Batshaw Youth and Family Centres.

Sylvie-Martin-Laforge has been named new executive director of the Quebec Community Groups Network, which is moving its headquarters to Montreal.

Ruth Pelletier has been named executive director of the Greater Montreal Community Development Initiative, a new English issues organization.

Quebec branches of the Victorian Order of Nurses (VON) have changed their name to NOVA.

The West Island Volunteer Bureau has been given the Hommage bénévolat-Québec award.

Deadline for nominations for the 2007 prix Hommage bénévolat-Québec is February 4.

A new directory of private residences, with specific details about language of care, is available from the Golden Age Federation at www.carrefour50ans.com

Guidelines on [chaining bilingual meetings](#) is available on the Treasury Board of Canada Website or at 1 613 957 2400.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309

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