

Feds slash volunteer sector funding

It did not make the headlines when Ottawa cut all funding to the Canadian Volunteerism Initiative (CVI) last autumn. But according to specialists in the field, the effects of that decision will be profound and long lasting. “I find it very disturbing,” says **Alison Stevens**, coordinator of training and consultation at the Volunteer Bureau of Montreal. “It will have an impact on the voluntary sector all over Canada, and will be keenly felt here in Montreal.”

The CVI was a joint undertaking between the voluntary sector and the Government of Canada to work more closely together to better serve Canadians. It was designed to strengthen the sector’s ability to operate efficiently and to enable it to participate in the public policy process. Since the accord was signed in 2001, a broad range of programs have addressed such key areas as public awareness, volunteerism, financing, information management, skills development, human resources management and regulatory affairs.

“In spite of a highly positive third-party evaluation of the CVI last year,” says Stevens, “the government suddenly decided to eliminate the program. The rationale was that it did ‘not meet the priorities of the federal government or Canadians’. I would disagree with that premise.”

Because its work is mainly behind the scenes, the CVI’s activities are not seen directly by the public. It will be a year or two before the negative effects of its being dismantled will start to be felt. The loss will hit the sector in different ways.

“Most of Canada’s 161,000 nonprofits are ill-equipped to promote their cause effectively, recruit and manage volunteers, or to handle important issues like accountability and risk management,” affirms Stevens. “These are areas where the CVI has been of major assistance. For the VBM, in particular, CVI provided us with professional media promotions to attract volunteers and crucial resources for managing and training volunteers. How can that be replaced?”

CCS celebrates its 75th

Catholic Community Services, CCS, has a new tag line that conveniently capsulizes its history: Serving individuals, families and communities since 1932. While its basic mission has remained constant, over the years CCS has continuously broadened its scope, focussing on efficient management and delivery of services. It now prides itself as a “model of what a nonprofit organization could become”.

It was during the Depression that several English Catholic welfare agencies decided to coordinate their work and to consolidate fundraising to meet the spiraling needs of their community. The Federation of Catholic Charities was chartered in 1932. In 1974, when many social services were absorbed into the parapublic system, the privately funded Catholic Federation (with the United Red Feather Services and their francophone counterparts) co-founded Centraide of Greater Montreal. The Federation agency was re-named Catholic Community Services.

“But, of course, our operations today are much broader than those historical Catholic roots,” says **Zenny Bryniawsky**, executive director. “We serve English-speaking individuals and families from many different cultures and religions throughout the Greater Montreal area.”

CCS services are wide-ranging. The agency runs three seniors’ centres and two kids’ summer camps. Its youth projects target employment prospects and anti-social behaviour. It has several family support programs that deal with parenting skills and early childhood development. In all, these and other CCS programs reach over 6,000 individuals every year. CCS also provides professional services to small community groups that require assistance. And it has created partnerships with healthcare establishments to better serve anglophones in East End Montreal.

Bryniawsky is optimistic about the future: “CCS has a solid financial base, thanks to Centraide. And our new results-based management approach should equip us to even better serve the community.”

It's 70 for Volunteer Bureau

Montreal's first volunteer bureau was founded in 1937 by the Montreal Junior League, a women's charitable organization, as a centre for its volunteer activities. Twenty years later, to reflect its growth and the participation of men in volunteerism, it became the Volunteer Bureau of Montreal (VBM). Funded in the early 1970s by United Red Feather Services and the Fédération des oeuvres de charité canadiennes françaises, VBM in 1974 became one of the original agencies of the newly formed Centraide of Greater Montreal.

The VBM helped set up Montreal's first Meals-on-Wheels group in 1966, and today coordinates a network of 80 groups and lunch clubs throughout the city. It also helped set up the Elizabeth Fry Society and Big Brothers and Big Sisters. The VBM also provides extensive training in volunteer management to other community organizations.

While cognizant of its historical roots in the anglophone community, the VBM became officially bilingual in 1970. Since then, it has been making steady progress in addressing the Montreal population as a whole. Last year, for example, close to 40 percent of the VBM's 1,500 interviewees were from the cultural communities. Today, some 700 community organizations are requesting volunteers from the Bureau, double that of 10 years ago.

That growth stems from a particular promotional strategy. "I've always seen volunteerism as a product that we have to sell to the population," says **Kevin Cohalan**, Bureau executive director. "We use radio, TV, print, outdoor advertising, school fairs — anything to show the very wide and varied range of volunteer possibilities to get people involved.

"The vision that we're trying to promote is that volunteerism is not just a case of being nice to your neighbour," Cohalan explains. "It's also a notion of the relationship that should exist between a citizen and society. The more active a role we each play, the more healthy our society is going to be."

Tyndale training aids adults find jobs

Tyndale-St. George's Community Centre is providing adults from visible minorities and immigrant families with a new chance to get into the workforce. The Tyndale Treasures program involves both class courses and hands-on training, and organizes internships with local businesses. Proven successful in a recent pilot project, the program was launched as a regular service in February.

"This program is unique," says **Beverly Trought**, program coordinator. "The people we're helping are dropouts, immigrants whose qualifications are not recognized here, and unemployed people who lack French or need their English improved to get a job. There's nothing else similar for anglophone adults."

The program offers intensive French-language and computer training. Participants learn job search methods and interpersonal skills. They receive on-the-job training in the Centre's new thrift shop, Tyndale Treasures. They then go through a three-week trial with participating businesses, where they gain retail experience and, frequently, employment.

"Our only problem now is funding," Trought explains. "Emploi-Québec pays the participants during the program, but we rely on private donors for training costs." For information: 514 935 2084.

Call for social housing grows

The Conseil des Montréalaises, a women's advisory body set up by the city, claims that women — particularly those who are aged, handicapped or have large families — are having a difficult time in finding affordable housing. In a report presented to the city in December, the Conseil decries the fact that Montreal has only 37 social housing units per 1000 households, compared with Toronto's 73, and New York's 148. The Conseil recommends an increase in social and cooperative housing. In a similar vein, a petition sponsored by the 33-member Coalition solidarité santé asks that the Blue Bonnets Raceway site be dedicated to low cost housing.

Centraide to honour youth

Centraide of Greater Montreal has introduced a new category to its annual roster of volunteer honorees. Its Antoinette Robidoux Award, which recognizes outstanding commitment to the community of a current or former volunteer of a Centraide-funded agency, will be duplicated to honour a young volunteer. The recipient will be named in June.

Help for the doubly disabled

A pilot program just launched by the Constance Lethbridge Rehabilitation Centre is bringing new hope to physically handicapped anglophones who also suffer from visual impairment and cannot easily read traditional books. It is thanks to a digitalized system that creates talking books in CD format that can be played on computers or dedicated machines.

The new CD talking books are only available from the Canadian Institute for the Blind (CNIB) or through partner libraries. Lethbridge will be encouraging Montreal libraries to take over the service once the pilot is over, so that it could be made available to a wider clientèle. In Montreal, the Bibliothèque nationale du Québec does supply adapted reading material to physically disabled clients, but only in French.

Montreal Initiative in high gear

The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) is moving quickly to develop strategies for the long-term development of the English-speaking community of Greater Montreal. Consultations with community leaders and specialists began in early March. A public forum will be held on April 11. A final report with recommendations for action will be presented to the community this summer. The key areas being addressed are demographics; education; health and social services; economic development and employment; arts, culture and heritage; and social participation. Discussion papers are available at: www.qcgn.ca/greatermontrealinitiative.

East End efforts adding up

Long deprived of ready access to healthcare services in English, anglophones living in Montreal's East End are soon to be receiving a lot more attention. This breakthrough is due to innovative partnerships between anglophone community organizations and local healthcare establishments. It is part of federally funded province-wide initiatives by the Community Health and Social Services Network and the Quebec Community Groups Network.

The East Montreal action was spearheaded by a partnership between CCS and four CSSSs in the territory. It was made possible through creation of a new local network of some 60 community organizations, schools and churches. Over the past two years, 13 community projects have been developed, eight of which are now being implemented. There are more to come.

There is to be a community learning centre, daycare and respite for intellectually disabled children, a diabetes education program, a health and literacy program for immigrant families, a support program for the mentally ill, a touring senior community centre, substance abuse detection and assistance programs for youth, family mediation and support, English language coaching for francophone professionals. Most projects will welcome a number of social work and healthcare students as interns.

Community learning centre looms large

The largest, and most far-reaching, of the East End projects is the new Community Learning Centre (CLC). Sponsored by the Quebec Ministry of Education, CLCs are being set up in schools as hubs of community education and development. The Laurier-MacDonald High School CLC will have a supra-regional as well as local mandate. Healthcare information and training will be made available to 14 other schools in outlying regions via a videoconferencing network. Other anglophone communities will thus benefit from many of the East End projects.

Groups get going

A growing number of companies and other organizations have become interested in arranging volunteer projects for groups of their people. The Volunteer Bureau of Montreal (VBM) has welcomed them with open arms. "Many projects are one-day blitzes," says **Gabrielle Richard**, VBM community relations coordinator. "An enthusiastic group can accomplish a lot in that time, though."

The projects are varied. One group of 50 employees cleaned up the kitchen and warehouse space of Montreal Harvest; another corporate team moved a community organization into its new offices. "There's no end of possibilities," says Richard. For further information: 514 842 3351.

McConnell money for social change

The J.W. McConnell Foundation is making a \$10 million, five-year commitment to a major effort to strengthen social innovation in Canada. It will involve public, private and nonprofit sectors.

The University of Waterloo will design and lead academic programs on innovation and will develop new methodologies to engage researchers and practitioners across the country to find and test innovative solutions to social problems. PLAN Institute, an entrepreneurial Vancouver nonprofit, will share its expertise on influencing policy change with organizations working on pressing social issues. The McConnell will focus on scaling up a number of promising social innovations that have already been identified.

New disability policy on the way

A federally appointed panel of experts has recommended the creation of new tools to enable families of disabled Canadians to plan for their future financial safety and security. They include a Disability Savings Plan, a Disability Savings Grant and a Canada Disability Bond. A similar policy had been announced by the previous government.

In brief

Thomas Davis was elected board chair of the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre.

Judy Martin was re-elected board chair of Batshaw Youth and Family Centres.

Thierry Vandal, president and CEO of Hydro-Québec, and **Norman M. Steinberg**, chair of Ogilvy Renault, have been named co-chairs of Centraide of Greater Montreal's 2007 fund-raising campaign.

Volunteer Week will be held during the week of April 15 to 21 under the theme: Volunteering, a Quiet Force.

The Greater Montreal Community Development Initiative is now located at 1255 University St., Suite 1000, Montreal H3B 3W6; telephone: 514 868 9044.

The Volunteer Bureau of Montreal is holding a half-day workshop on The Canadian code for volunteer involvement, on May 1. Registration fee is \$10. For information: 514 842 3351.

A free lecture, entitled Palliative Care isn't just about Cancer, will be given at 5:30 p.m. on May 8, in the Charles Martin Amphitheater, McIntyre Medical Sciences Building, 3655 Sir William Osler Promenade. For information: 514 499 0345.

The Canada Revenue Agency has launched a section on its Website that provides pertinent information concerning charitable donations. For information, see: www.cra.gc.ca/charities.

The Montreal Children's Hospital is hosting the first Canadian National Transcultural Health Conference, to be held on May 10 and 11. For information: info@nthc2007.ca.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309

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