

Montreal area health care targeted

Contrary to popular belief, access to healthcare services in English is not universally available in the Greater Montreal region. This fact is borne out in a recent report compiled by the Greater Montreal Community Development Initiative, a project of the Quebec Community Groups Network. It confirms that because of low numbers of English-speaking professionals, information gaps and uneven distribution of services, many anglophones are being deprived of the services to which they are entitled.

To address this issue, task forces are being set up in each of the three administrative regions of Montreal, Laval and the South Shore. They will bring together members of local community organizations and public health networks to work on bettering the organization of health and social services to their English-speaking populations. The goal is to establish permanent regional forums that will carry out this mandate on a long-term basis.

The Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) is sponsoring and managing this new initiative, with funding from the Department of Canadian Heritage. The CHSSN has already spearheaded the development of similar networks in other regions of the province.

Access programs finally approved

The Quebec Cabinet issued a decree in December approving access programs for English-language healthcare services submitted by the province's regional health and social services agencies. "There were substantial gains over previous programs," says **Ron MacNeil**, secretary of the provincial advisory committee for the delivery of English services. "There has been some climate change in Quebec."

These new programs are valid for three years, but as local CSSSs develop their new services organization, access programs will become part of their overall planning. "It's a major improvement over past policy," says MacNeil.

MAB hits the hundred mark

The Montreal Association for the Blind (MAB) is celebrating its 100th anniversary this year. In honour of this milestone, Canada Post is issuing a special stamp and commemorative envelope on April 21. Depicting a seeing-eye dog, the stamp will be printed in Braille, a first in North America.

The MAB was founded in 1908 by Philip E. Layton, a blind Montreal businessman. It then comprised a social club, a Braille lending library and a sheltered workshop. In 1912, a residential school was added, for blind elementary students who were subsequently integrated into their local high school. This was a first for Canada. Over the years, MAB's services continued to expand to include residential and long-term care for seniors.

In 2006, the MAB merged with the Mackay Rehabilitation Centre, an institution caring for children with language and motor disabilities and for deaf children and adults. The new institution retains two sites, but clinical services are being reorganized on an age-oriented basis. "The Mackay site will handle serving children and youth," explains **Christine Boyle**, executive director. "The MAB site will address the needs of adults and seniors with a sensorial impairment. The main impetus for this decision is that many children have more than one impairment, so caring for them at a single site makes more sense."

The MAB-Mackay continues to house a specialized school at each site designed for children needing intensive rehabilitation. Many go on to integrate into regular schools. All get to enjoy the Massiwiippi summer camp where even the most handicapped get a chance to sail and water-ski.

And the future? "We've developed an impressive level of clinical expertise over the years," says Boyle. "And we'll continue to stay abreast of any developments that will improve the lives of our clients. Eventually I'd like to see us become more involved in research, to take the care we provide to an even higher level."

Queen E opens new emergency clinic

The Queen Elizabeth Health Complex has opened a new walk-in clinic dedicated to urgent care. Staffed by physicians from the onsite MUHC Family Medicine Centre, the new clinic is open daily until 8 p.m. and on weekends from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The complex's radiology service has extended its schedule to accommodate the clinic's patients.

"This is an important initiative on two levels," says **Irene Tschernomor**, executive director. "We're providing our anglophone community with easy access to urgent care which, at the same time, lessens the burden on hospital ERs. We were able to make this happen because our Family Medicine group has just been officially recognized as part of the Health Ministry's provincial network of family medicine clinics, so funding was made available."

New help for physically disabled

The Constance Lethbridge Rehabilitation Centre has just opened an Activities of Daily Living apartment for its clients. The unit's kitchen counters and appliances and bathroom facilities are all adapted for persons living with a motor disability to allow them to gain or regain the skills required to live independently. The unit also features a therapy area with interactive sports games videos, designed to help them regain balance and coordination.

Aging of volunteers to be addressed

The Community Council on Volunteerism (CCV) will be holding a workshop in April for volunteer managers on the issue of aging volunteers. "The majority of our volunteers are aging," says **Valerie Tannage**, CCV president, "and a growing number of them are showing signs of early onset of cognitive impairment. How do we determine their condition? Should we inform relatives? What are the legal implications? We'll have experts on hand to discuss such questions." The CCV is a multi-sector network of 25 institutions and nonprofits serving the English-speaking community of Montreal.

Women's Centre turns 35

When the Women's Centre of Montreal opened in 1973, its role was to provide information and referral services to women in need. Thirty-five years and half a million clients later, the Centre is today a major hub of social services activity, serving over 35,000 women a year.

"I'm really proud of what we've accomplished," affirms **Johanne Bélisle**, executive director. "We've developed a unique and wide range of services, mostly in response to requests from women themselves. Unfortunately, many of the social problems we faced 35 years ago are still there – poverty, isolation, domestic violence – particularly among new immigrant families."

Bélisle points to the revamping of its facility and services three years ago as the pivotal point in the Centre's history. "All our services were regrouped under one roof to provide one-stop, streamlined access to services," she explains. "It's not only easier for the women who come to us, but also for our staff, who can work together dovetailing our complementary services for individual cases. That's our biggest strength now."

As well as direct services such as food aid, clothing, legal information and support groups for victims of violence, the Centre has introduced such client-specific programs as La Cinquentelle, to help older women find employment, and the Mother and Child Early Intervention program, to foster positive child development. "The care we provide is making such a big difference in the lives of our women," says Bélisle. "We also give them hope, that they too can live in dignity. I'm very proud of that."

Lachine joins MUHC

The Lachine Hospital becomes part of the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) on March 31. The integration is meant to improve the Hospital's services and enhance its surgical capabilities. It will continue to operate as a French-language institution.

Camp continues connecting with kids

Camp Amy Molson has introduced a new program to maintain contact with its campers throughout the year. The staff is organizing special events to bring the children, their councillors and families together, writing them letters and sending birthday cards. The idea is to strengthen the positive relationships developed at camp and to foster a sense of belonging to a positive community.

“It’s part of our preventative approach,” says **Shauna Joyce**, executive director. “These five- to 13-year olds come from disadvantaged environments where they are often subject to negative peer influences. At camp we help them to develop problem solving and conflict resolution skills. By prolonging our contact with them past camp life, we hope to add to their progress in the long term.”

Camp Amy Molson, once a Red Feather agency, was founded in 1944 by the Ladies Benevolent Society. This new program is being funded through a grant from the Foundation of Greater Montreal.

Volunteer possibilities for immigrants

The Volunteer Board of Montreal (VBM) is looking for opportunities for recent immigrants who speak very little English or French. Although possibilities might be limited, the VBM hopes that some volunteer work might be found for those who have expressed an interest.

“We’ve done some promotion with organizations and agencies working with newcomers,” explains **Kevin Cohalan**, executive director. “Volunteering is a great way for them to learn about their new country and to practice their new language. We’d like to have more volunteer jobs to offer them.”

The VBM is polling its member organizations for possible openings, and will be exploring success stories elsewhere. Funding for this project is from the Réseau de l’action bénévole du Québec. For information: Alison Stevens, 514 842 3351.

Focus is on Black families

Important inroads are being made in improving the lives and prospects of troubled families in Montreal’s Black communities. The Strengthening Black Families program (SBF) is designed to tackle the causes of their family dysfunction and to provide support and impetus for change. The newly incorporated African Canadian Development and Prevention Network is overseeing the project.

“This is a really, really, good program,” affirms **Nadine Dominique**, SBF coordinator. “We know that poor parental supervision, communication problems and failing family interrelationships can lead to substance abuse, poor school performance and behavioural problems among children in our communities. SBF addresses such risk factors by strengthening family bonds and parenting skills and by improving the children’s social and life skills.”

The SBF process, directed by trained facilitators, involves the whole family. “It is very interactive,” explains Dominique. “At each session, parents and children first learn specific behavioural skills in separate groups, then come together to work on adapting these skills as a family. They’re expected to practice these skills at home between sessions.”

The program is managed through local Black community organizations. “Each neighbourhood is different, with its own needs,” says Dominique. “The N.D.G. and LaSalle Black Community Associations were the first to adopt the program. Côte-des-Neiges is in its second year. Participants are so enthusiastic about what the program has done for their families, we’re now developing one for Little Burgundy.”

The SBF program was developed in the U.S. and applied with significant success among American Black and Hispanic families. Users must obtain program copyright and pay American trainers to train local facilitators. Health Canada funds the Montreal program. McGill’s Centre for Research on Children and Families is evaluating its effects.

Fathers should figure in child welfare

The McGill Centre for Research on Children and Families is spearheading Canadian involvement in an international initiative to re-examine the place of fathering in family life. The premise is that mothers have traditionally been over-burdened while fathers have been excluded from the care of children during times of difficulty. Researchers will examine how to engage fathers constructively in family life through policies that promote gender equality. "It's a challenge for social workers, and it's an issue we're eager to explore," says **Linda Davies**, McGill social work professor and lead investigator.

Leading scholars in Canada and the U.K. will be collaborating in developing father-inclusive child welfare practice as part of the international Gender and Child Welfare Network. The McGill group is hosting a Network workshop in April, and is setting up a Canadian website. A public lecture on Why gender matters in child welfare is scheduled for 2:30 p.m., Wednesday, April 2, at the School of Social Work, 3506 University St. Call: 514 398 7064.

Budget brings some benefits

The recently deposited federal budget has directed \$110 million to the Mental Health Commission of Canada for research projects to help Canadians with mental illness who are homeless. The Commission will set up five demonstration research projects: in Montreal, Winnipeg, Toronto, Moncton and Vancouver. Each will focus on a distinct group of homeless people such as those with a substance abuse problem, aboriginal Canadians and non-English-speaking new immigrants.

Health survey highlights caregivers

The recently released Health Care in Canada Survey reports that almost one quarter of Canadians cared for a family member or friend with a serious health problem the past year. Wait times and poor access to family doctors and specialists were the top health issues concerning the survey responders.

In brief

Akute Azu is the new executive director of the Black Community Resources Centre.

Marc Billings has been named Montreal region representative on the Health and Social Services Commissioner' Forum.

Maria Day-Trudel is the new director of Saint Michael's Mission.

Richard B. Evans, CEO of Rio Tinto Alcan, and **Jacques Lamarre**, president and CEO of SNC Lavalin, will be the co-chairs of Centraide of Greater Montreal's 2008 fund-raising campaign.

Gerry Lafferty has been named executive director of the New Hope Senior Citizens' Centre.

Catherine Letar is the new executive director of Chez Doris.

Mathew Pearce has been named executive director of the Old Brewery Mission.

Conrad Sauvé has been appointed secretary-general and CEO of the Canadian Red Cross.

Robert Martini has been appointed director of planning for CCS.

Volunteer Week, under the theme of Helping. Uniting. Building. will be held from April 27-May 3.

An AMI-Québec telephone conference on ...what exactly is anxiety? is scheduled for 7-8 p.m., March 26. Call 1 866 396 2433 to register.

Meeting Smarter, a guide to better nonprofit board meetings, is available at: www.boardsource.org .

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309

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