

## City Mission celebrates centennial

The Montreal City Mission (MCM), a Ministry of downtown St. James United Church, is celebrating its hundredth birthday this year. MCM roots date back to 1826 when a young Scotsman, David Nasmith, initiated the City Mission movement in Glasgow to bring succor to the underprivileged poor, and subsequently carried his message around the world. The movement went through several configurations in Montreal before the present permanent Mission was established in 1910.

“Our Mission reflects the colour of Montreal,” explains **Paula Kline**, MCM director, “in that we work in an inter-faith, inter-cultural context. During the past 20 years, there has been an ever-growing need for our services from refugees and immigration claimants. Last year close to 2500 newcomers approached us for help.”

Recent government cutbacks forced the closing of two of the MCM’s refugee shelters; the remaining facility houses up to 22 men. “So many fall between the cracks of our social services system and become homeless,” says Kline. “They’re ending up in the city’s large homeless centres, which provide them with temporary accommodation. We’re now starting a new longer-term housing program, and our next target is to help newcomers find employment.”

The MCM also operates a clinic that provides legal assistance and accompaniment for refugee claimants. “We’re expanding that service to focus on the growing number of senior immigrants who have lost their family sponsorships,” says Kline.

Young people are also a major focus of attention. The MCM operates a children’s day camp and formed the Every Kids’ Choir, an interfaith ensemble, that was so successful, a seniors’ choir soon followed. Its student leadership program provides internships for some 15 university students every year. Last May, the Mission was awarded the province’s Jacques Couture Citizenship Prize for the Promotion of Intercultural Rapprochement. For further information: 514 844 9128, ext. 202.

## Calling seniors to action

The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) has just introduced an action plan defining the steps that must be taken to improve the living conditions of the province’s English-speaking seniors. Blazing a Trail for Active and Healthy Aging identifies some serious gaps in the availability of services for anglophone seniors and outlines priority actions that are required to meet their needs.

The problems of isolation, inadequate housing and lack of mobility are among those that will take time to address. But immediate action is being taken on two fronts. For QCGN the first challenge is getting seniors and their caregivers onboard and implicated in planning and development of services.

“We want to mobilize English-speaking seniors across the province,” affirms **Michelle Dupuis**, QCGN director of Community Support and Network Development. “So one of our key recommendations was creation of a province-wide network. It would advocate for seniors’ rights and provide a forum for information exchange and best practices.”

The QCGN recommendations have caught the Government’s eye – and support. A two-year grant has been provided to set up the seniors’ network and to continue developing the database on services available in English to seniors. While many seniors, particularly in the regions, do not have access to the Internet, this vital information will be available to their caregivers and to community organizations involved with directly providing services or referrals. The idea is to streamline information onto a “one-stop shopping” site to communicate effectively about available resources and services.

## Centraide campaign takes off

Centraide of Greater Montreal launched its 2010 fund-raising campaign on September 28. The goal this year is \$55.3 million. Last year’s campaign reaped a record \$54.3 million, which is supporting over 350 community organizations across the city.

## Street workers winning friends

A small group of community workers is making a big difference in the lives of many at-risk youth in western Montreal. West-Island Youth Action (AJOI) is a proactive outreach program designed to assist young adolescents cope with problems that could lead to serious anti-social behaviour. The program's four street workers have been reaching over 3000 youth a year.

"The West Island is often considered a wealthy enclave," says Howard Nadler, co-president of the AJOI board, "but there are many pockets of poverty, particularly in areas with high concentrations of cultural communities. But substance abuse, family and school problems, and behavioural difficulties are rampant on both sides of the economic divide."

The AJOI workers, three male and one female, are literally on the street five days a week, visiting with young people in parks, malls and streets. "The kids have nothing to do after school, so that's where they usually hang out," says Nadler. "The workers have also enlisted the cooperation of area schools, and visit classrooms to spread the word about their availability to talk to the kids about their problems and to help find the social services they might need."

"Our workers are specially trained for what they do," says Benoit Langevin, AJOI director. "And they know their boroughs inside out – each has its own characteristics – so they know where to find the kids in need. A significant measure of how they've been winning the confidence of their target audience is that the kids themselves are the biggest source of referrals to our services."

Curtailed by recent federal grant cuts, AJOI has just been welcomed as a new agency by Centraide of Greater Montreal with a three-year annual grant of \$50,000. These monies will ensure that the program infrastructure can be maintained. The municipalities contract for the street workers' services. "We're hoping that other municipalities will sign on so that we can help their youth as well," says Langevin. For further information: 514 674 1270.

## New clubhouse to help recovery

Forty years ago, an innovative approach to helping people recover from psychiatric problems was introduced in New York City. Today, these people are being welcomed into over 300 special "clubhouses" around the world. The first one in Montreal opened on Décarie Boulevard in July

"Ours is called the Donald Berman UP House," says **Ruth McLellan**, the new clubhouse director. "It was founded by a group of individuals affected by family mental health problems; UP stands for Urban Paredes, their charitable organization. It is financed with private funds, a major donation having been provided by the David Berman Foundation."

The basic concept is that people with diagnosed psychiatric problems become members, at no cost, of a club dedicated to their psychosocial needs. The club does not offer therapy or counselling. All activities are work-related: members participate in running the clubhouse according to their abilities and interests – in the kitchen, in communication and on administrative tasks. The aim is to gently re-integrate the members into social interaction and to restore their confidence and self-esteem.

"Staff and members work side by side," says McLellan, "This hands-on approach builds a great camaraderie. It's a formula that is getting us more and more referrals. In just a few weeks we've attracted over 80 members, and can accommodate up to 400. We're developing a real community here." For further information: 514 764 559.

## Elder abuse aid coming

The Quebec government will be spending nearly \$20 million over the next five years to counter the rising problem of abuse of the elderly. Starting on October 1, a television ad campaign, starring ex-CTV anchor Bill Haugland, will focus on the issue. A 1-800 elder abuse help line will be launched and a research chair established at Université de Sherbrooke to study the dynamics of such abuse.

## Shelter wants to do more

The Native Women's Shelter of Montreal can care for up to 16 women and children in difficulty, but must turn away many more for want of resources. And recent withdrawal of federal funding has forced the cancellation of two major programs that provided support and direction to the shelter's users. Turning the tide will take time and effort.

"Losing that money was a real shock," says **Nakuset**, executive director of the shelter. "For 10 years it supported a program that offered a wide variety of healing sessions and workshops dedicated to restoring self identity and hope to our women. We've been lobbying hard to get that grant restored: we've met with the House of Commons Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and with the Opposition parties, and we've started a petition to try to change the Government's stand.

"There is a lot of homelessness among native women who leave their communities hoping for a better life in the city," Nakuset affirms. "They encounter a lot of racism, language problems and, too often, drug and alcohol abuse situations. We provide them a healing environment and help them find housing, treatment or other services that they might need. We also have an outreach worker to provide follow-up assistance to our clients."

There is other political action under way as well. Nakuset is co-founder and co-chair of a new initiative, the Urban Aboriginal Strategy Network. "There are several First Nations organizations in Montreal," she explains, "and because we weren't working together, women and children – and others – were falling between the cracks. We have to prioritize our needs together to effectively find solutions." For further information: 514 933 4688.

## Literacy Centre cited

The Centre for Literacy of Quebec was named a national centre of excellence on adult literacy and mandated to offer its services across the country

## REISA ready to help

In an ironic turning of the tables, the East Island Network for English Services (REISA) is offering to assist the public healthcare system in serving its minority community. Following public consultations on mental health with East End stakeholders, REISA determined that anglophones in general are not asking for services in English – they seek help in other territories. And for any who do, they deal with institutions with few employees who are even marginally bilingual and programs that are not adapted to their needs.

"Even worse, the local CSSSs have no means of recording who among their clients is anglophone," affirms **Janet Forsyth**, project manager. "So they don't have a measure of the amplitude of the problem. This is where we want to intervene."

REISA is offering to provide an administrator to create and conduct a task force of public service representatives to find solutions to the problem. "We're taking the initiative in proposing this kind of partnership," says Forsyth. "We're not just asking for services, we're bringing something to the table."

## Getting seniors out

Last year CCS conducted a pilot project in Little Burgundy designed to foster a sense of community among senior residents of social housing units in the area. It has proven to be such a success that city housing officials have asked that a similar program be launched in LaSalle

"Our community worker will be visiting residents in two HLMs, to get a sense of their interests and needs," says **Rose Mary Silletta**, manager of the St. Antoine 50+ Community Centre. "Together they'll draw up a program of onsite activities, while residents will also be encouraged to participate in those offered at our Centre. The goal is to help break their isolation by getting them involved in happenings in their residences, and eventually to draw them into the community."

## Tomatoes on the menu

Some lucky local seniors are enjoying their own freshly grown tomatoes, thanks to a home gardening project developed by the Meals-on-Wheels arm of the Volunteer Bureau of Montreal. Tomato seeds planted by volunteers from St. George's High School last winter grew into seventy-five mature plants that were delivered to clients in five MOW groups in early summer. The balcony crops have met with much success, and appreciation

"We introduced this project last year, and the response was so positive we decided to do a repeat," says **Marjorie Northrop**, coordinator of Volunteer Food Services. "These clients wouldn't usually have the strength to do much gardening, but watching their own little tomato crop grow, and enjoying the harvest, is rewarding for them. I think of it as feeding body and soul at the same time."

## Caregivers attracting attention

The plight of Canadians caring for loved ones has been steadily gaining more attention in this country. According to recent studies by the **Canadian Institute for Health Information**, there are over two million informal caregivers looking after seniors alone. And one in six say they experience difficulty with coping and suffer feelings of anger, depression and anxiety.

The **Canadian Caregiver Coalition** has called on the federal government to launch a caregiving strategy that would provide a framework to guide governments, employers and individuals in shifting awareness and actions toward family caregivers.

The **Canadian Medical Association** is recommending that more financial relief and respite programs for caregivers be instituted.

**VON Canada** operates an interactive website [www.caregiver-connect.ca](http://www.caregiver-connect.ca), where caregivers can access information and expertise and communicate with their peers in a virtual caregivers meeting place.

## In brief

**Bob Bechard** has been named director of Nazareth House.

**Ron De Leskie** is the new board chair of CCS.

**Michèle Domingue** has been appointed coordinator for English-language services at the Montérégie Health and Social Services Agency.

**Marie-France Juneau** has been appointed executive director of NOVA West Island.

**Linda Leith** has been elected president of the Quebec Community Groups Network.

**Mary McDaid** has been named board chair for the English-Speaking Catholic Council.

**Patrick Murphy-Lavallée** is executive director of the Constance Lethbridge Rehabilitation Centre.

**Louis L. Roquet** is new board chair for Centraide of Greater Montreal.

**Valerie Shannon** has been elected board chair of the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre.

**Wendy Thomson**, director of the McGill School of Social Work, has been appointed by the Ontario government to the Commission to Promote Sustainable Child Welfare.

**Annie Young** is new board chair for AMI-Quebec.

Volunteer Week has been changed to April 10-16.

The 2010 Low-Beer lecture on Living Homeless: my learning from street life is on Wednesday, October 27, at 7 p.m. For information: 514 486 1448.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309

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