

VBM celebrates in style

The Volunteer Bureau of Montreal (VBM) launched its 75th anniversary in style on December 5 at Montreal City Hall, with a host of dignitaries and some 200 clients and volunteers toasting the event. "It was such a fine tribute to the VBM," says **Alison Stevens**, executive director. "Above all, we wanted to salute all Montreal volunteers, past present and future."

The VBM has a solid history to celebrate. It helped set up Montreal's first Meals-on-Wheels group in 1966, and today coordinates a network of some 80 food service groups throughout the city. It also helped set up the Elizabeth Fry Society and Big Brothers and Big Sisters. A thousand community organizations are requesting volunteers from the Bureau. Last year, over 45 percent of the VBM's 1500 interviewees were from cultural communities. Keeping up with the times, the Bureau is now on Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and LinkedIn.

Now for something new

As part of its celebration, the VBM is introducing to Quebec an innovative way to recruit volunteers, while at the same time supporting local emerging artists. Timeraiser combines a volunteer fair and silent auction, whereby the bids made on a piece of art are paid for with volunteer hours. Very successful elsewhere in Canada, the first event in Quebec will take place in Montreal in April. The Bureau is principal organizer of the venture here.

The VBM is here to stay. "Volunteerism contributes to Montreal's well-being in a unique and vital way," says Stevens. "It's more than a noble cause; it's a fundamental thread in the social fabric of our city. We're so proud to carry on that tradition."

The VBM traces its roots to Canada's first volunteer centre, founded in 1937 by the Montreal Junior League. It was one of the 100 social service agencies funded by United Red Feather Services. In 1974, the VBM was one of the original agencies of the newly-formed Centraide of Greater Montreal.

OBM to house new centres

Montreal's Old Brewery Mission (OBM) will soon be able to offer clients clinical assistance at its downtown site. Negotiations with the City of Montreal are nearing completion for introduction of a detox centre in the OBM's Maison Roger Beaulieu. The City is to rent two floors of the three-story building so that l'exode, an organization specializing in treatment of substance addictions, can serve a homeless clientele. "We've always helped people to dry out," says **Matthew Pearce**, OBM director general, "but we haven't had a detox program here before."

Parallel to that service, the Mission will be setting up a treatment centre for homeless people suffering from Hepatitis C and AIDS. They will receive specialized care for as long as treatment is required. At the same time, the OBM will accompany them through its transitional out-of-homelessness program. "A lot of good things are happening now in our quest to change the face of homelessness in Montreal," says Pearce. "I'm glad the OBM has had something to do with it."

The café is coming

It has been two years in the making, but Black young people in Little Burgundy should soon have their own community meeting place. The Desta Café will boast social and educational activities, special cultural and artistic events, and nutritious food. All developed, and to be managed, by the youths themselves.

"The Café is an outgrowth of the entrepreneurial program we run for our marginalized youth" says **Frances Waithe**, executive director of the Desta Black Community Network. "There have been 25 young people working on this concept; now a core group of six is involved in putting the project into action. Once it's up and operating full time, there will be more participants benefitting from this opportunity to put what they've learned into practice." For information: 514 932 7597.

Literacy for seniors

The South Shore Community Partners Network (SSCPN) has launched a project to raise the health literacy of seniors and older adults living on Montreal's South Shore. Raising Health Literacy Awareness is designed to address the fact that over eighty percent of Canadian seniors cannot understand labels, or material provided by doctors, clinics or hospitals. Over half of ER admissions are medication-related, and most are seniors.

"We have the largest number of English-speaking seniors off the island of Montreal," says **Kevin Erskine-Henry**, SSCPn president. "There are over 12,000; they make up 22 percent of our population. The point is that while most can read, so many cannot comprehend."

At the SSCPn information sessions, professionals give practical advice and written material that demystifies medical terminology. Discussions cover such topics as how to understand labels, how to manage prescriptions, the role of medications, health and nutrition, how medications interact with food. "We view this as preventive," says Erskine-Henry. "The more we can educate our seniors, the more we can help them to avoid problems." For information: sscpn@bell.net.

Diabetes study successful

A two-year feasibility study on telemonitoring as a means of helping diabetic patients manage their disease has confirmed the viability and value of such a system. "We now see what works and where improvements need to be made," says **Antonia Arnaert**, project founder and McGill School of Nursing researcher. "Among the several English-speaking communities chosen for the study, patients on the Lower North Shore had the highest level of improvement, so the system will be implemented there. In 2012, we're going to set up a new, controlled study to determine costs and policies for its eventually being integrated into the provincial healthcare system."

Center answers new need

When it was set up in Pierrefonds in 1999, the Family Resource Center blazed a trail in helping young children with learning disabilities such as Attention Deficit Disorder. Now the Center has introduced a special program for older children that is helping change their lives.

"We were originally set up to work with younger kids, four to 11," says **Carrie Goldberg**, the Center's founder and executive director. "But we came to realize that a lot of youth 13 and up wanted these services, too, but were embarrassed to ask for them. And they wanted individual attention rather than group meetings because they didn't want to discuss problems in front of their peers. Most of all, they just wanted to sit down and talk to someone."

So, Goldberg developed a modified program for these older youth that was piloted over the summer. It took 17 young people, aged 13 to 25, through the Center's basic program of social behavior and academic skills training, but introduced a new element – mentoring.

"That one-on-one attention was the key," says Goldberg. "Parents, and the youth themselves, were amazed at how they had changed. Most developed more self-confidence. Some just learned to calm down. They all feel much better about themselves."

The pilot has now been vamped into a three-year program beginning with 30 youth, 30 to be added each year for a total of 90. "I believe that we have to build our community one kid at a time," says Goldberg. "We're on our way."

It is a challenge. According to Quebec education ministry statistics, nearly 25,000 public school students receive professional services related to behavioural difficulties; half are enrolled in primary school. Even children in kindergarten are suffering from anxiety and depression. Requests for intervention for behavioural problems are three times more likely than for any other problem in childhood. For information: 514 685 5912.

Health passport travels well

The Megantic English-speaking Community Development Corp., based in Thetford Mines, has come up with a novel way of helping English-speakers to navigate their way through the Quebec healthcare system. It is a “health passport” that carries pertinent personal medical information and medical terminology that create a dialogue between the patient and healthcare professionals.

“Someone who doesn’t speak French – and many anglophone seniors don’t – often takes a family member or friend to translate in the ER or walk-in clinic,” says **Suzanne Aubre**, executive director. “But if no one is available, what do they do? We came up with the idea of the health passport. The size of a standard passport, it’s an easy to carry, easy to use tool. And it’s bilingual, so that a unilingual-French service provider can read it as well. It has certainly met with very enthusiastic response. Francophones are asking for it now for when they travel outside Quebec.” For further information: 1 418 332 3851.

AMI a champion

AMI-Quebec has been selected as the 2011 “National Champion of Mental Health in the Community”. In announcing the award, the Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health (CAMIMH) honoured AMI “for its outstanding contributions to advance the mental health agenda in Canada”. The Alliance recognized “AMI-Quebec’s work helping families manage the effects of mental illness, shining a light on one of the most important issues facing Canadians today”. AMI was cited as a “leader and innovator in the mental health community in Canada”.

CAMIMH is an alliance of 19 national organizations dedicated to increasing awareness about mental illness, improving mental health literacy and working with government to develop a comprehensive national strategy on mental health and mental illness in Canada.

Palliative care report in

The Parliamentary Committee on Palliative Care and Compassion (PCPCC) has completed its year-long consultation with hundreds of Canadians across the country. Its report, Not to be Forgotten, urges that specific action be taken on palliative care, elder abuse and suicide prevention.

The Committee points out that less than one-third of Canadians needing palliative care receive it, and what is available is very much a patchwork of services. Members recommend that the federal government establish a Palliative Care Secretariat to oversee development of a national strategy on the issue. Hospice programs, a national public awareness campaign, and information on pain control methods are also addressed.

The Committee also recommends development of national research and awareness programs on suicide prevention and on elder abuse. Funding assistance for community organizations is part of its concern. Measures to financially support caregivers are also called for. The full report is available at: www.pcpcc-cpspsc.com.

Focus on family violence

The East Island Network for English-language Services (REISA) will be hosting a workshop on family violence for English-speaking healthcare providers in January. It will be conducted by Educaloï, a nonprofit organization funded by Justice Canada, which provides legal information to the public in everyday language. Its Family Violence Toolkit Project combines legal information kits and workshop discussions with experts in the field.

The project’s goal is to explain the laws dealing with family violence and the roles of various interveners who work with people experiencing family violence, such as social workers, teachers and community organizations. Topics include family law, the role of police, the criminal court process and youth protection.

Awards available

The Donner Canadian Foundation, this country's largest recognition program for non-profit social services organizations, has announced the seven winners of its 2011 Awards for Excellence in the Delivery of Social Services. None were from Quebec. The Foundation will be calling for applications for its 2012 awards in February.

Applicants are ranked on their performance in 10 key areas, including management and governance, the use of staff and volunteers, innovation, program costs, and outcome monitoring. For information: www.donnerfoundation.org.

UN lauds volunteerism

The first United Nations State of the World's Volunteerism report was published on December 5. It states that "volunteerism is massive in terms of numbers, but misconceptions and the lack of standard measuring methodologies obscure its reach and scope". It finds that "volunteer action is an essential means of overcoming social exclusion as it can improve feelings of self-worth and help to develop vocational and other skills". It also cautions that "states should not see volunteerism as a way to justify reductions in service provision". The complete report is available at: www.volunteer.ca.

Bringing baby boomers onboard

Volunteer Canada has produced a guide for attracting the baby boomer generation to volunteer. Building Blocks for Boomer Volunteer Engagement provides a detailed overview of the characteristics of that generation and recruitment tactics that might prove successful. For example, 62 percent of baby boomers have held down two jobs at the same time, so they expect organizations to be well managed and efficient in the use of their time. Because 25 percent has considered running for political office, organizations should consider them to sit on boards and be involved in visible marketing of their services. For information: www.volunteer.ca.

In brief

The Montreal regional advisory committee for access to health and social services in English has been named: **Cyril Morgan**, president, **Howard Berger**, **John Brkich**, **Dora Cesta**, **Carol Common**, **James Gates**, **Maxine Lithwick**, **Sherri McLeod**, **Bruno Mital**, **Gary H. Waxman**, and **James Wong**,

Marie-Josée Gariépy has been named president of The Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation.

Colin Irving is new board president for Tyndale-St Georges Community Centre.

Judy Martin, president of the board of Batshaw Youth and Family Centres, has received the 2011 Lifetime Achievement Award from the Quebec Chapter of the Association of Fundraising Professionals.

David M. Wayland was elected chair and president of the board of the Grace Dart Foundation.

The Quebec Ministry on Immigration and Cultural Communities is sponsoring a one-day forum on issues concerning Black families, in February, in Montreal. For information: 514 737 3213.

AMI-Quebec is holding round table discussions on: Laughter: Learn why it's good for you: February 2; Could it be mental illness? How to encourage someone to get help: March 28; Psychiatric medications and other treatments: May 16. All are held from 7 p.m. to 9 p.m. at the AMI office, and will be available through videoconferencing outside Montreal. To register: 514 486 1448.

The name of the 140-year-old Hôpital Louis-H. Lafontaine has been changed to l'Institut de santé mentale de l'Université de Montréal.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309

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