

Monuments to merge

With a combined history of over 365 years of service to children and adults with physical and sensorial disabilities, two venerable Montreal institutions are to become one in July. The Constance Lethbridge Rehabilitation Centre and the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre will join to form an “alliance of disabilities”.

“It is a complicated alliance because one is public and one is private,” says **Scott Conrod**, president of the Lethbridge board. “But there are strategically crucial commonalities. We represent the same bilingual community, we both are designated to provide services in English, and we’re both affiliated with McGill University. So it’s a good match.”

The initial reason for the merger is the need to share and reduce administrative costs. Each centre will, however, maintain its clinical operations and its own governance board. Eventually, there will be a new name for the joint institution. “We’re looking down the road at an institute that will cover the whole range of disabilities,” says Conrod. “This is a commitment for the next 100 years.”

Batshaw to build

Batshaw Youth and Family Centres has been given the go-ahead to build two new, closed, units to house young offenders on its Dorval campus. In February, the Supreme Court of Canada refused to hear an appeal by the City of Dorval to reverse lower court decisions to allow the expansion. Strong opposition from the community had stalled the project for over 10 years.

“We’re reminding people that we’ve been in Dorval for over 25 years without incident,” says **Leigh Johnson**, acting director of Residential Services. “The kids who will be transferred from our ancient facility in Prévost will be in a very secure setting. At the end of the day, no one can argue against the fact that these are our own English kids and they need help.”

Children’s plan progressing

The ambitious proposal for a new vocation for the Montreal Children’s Hospital is picking up speed. Presented to the Health and Social Services Agency in June, the comprehensive Villages Santé des Grands Jardins has now progressed into the “clinical project” stage. A more finely-detailed document should be ready in May.

The Villages Santé concept entails transforming the hospital into a hub of first-line health and social services for the downtown area (*Red Feather Forum*, June 2012). These would range from birthing centre to palliative care, include specialized services for the mentally ill and for aboriginal people, and care for vulnerable seniors. It would foster social programs that promote the wellbeing of the community.

“We’re very happy that the Agency has given us this support,” says **Marc Sougavinski**, executive director of the CSSS de la Montagne, promoter of the project. “Our steering committee represents a good cross-section of the community, but we’ll be asking for more feedback during public information sessions we’ll be holding before the summer.”

Homeless to be abandoned?

A five-city research study on homelessness and mental illness is coming to a close on March 31, and some of the research subjects might not have any place to live. The \$110 million project, known as At Home/Chez Soi, was initiated by the Mental Health Commission of Canada in 2009. It provided housing and clinical support for some 1000 mentally-ill homeless people across the country. The federal government will continue rent payments in the other participating cities, but in Montreal 160 mentally-ill homeless people could well be back on the street, without psychosocial attention.

“It’s completely outrageous,” exclaims **Matthew Pearce**, executive director of the Old Brewery Mission. “But if new rents are found, we’ll provide them with support to help manage their autonomy.”

Aboriginal health at issue

A coalition of First Nations Montrealers is spearheading a plan to set up a holistic health and healing centre for the city's Aboriginal community. The 600-member Montreal Urban Aboriginal Community Strategy Network (the NETWORK), was established in 2008 to work towards improving the quality of life of the 18,000 Aboriginal people living in Montreal. It is comprised of representatives of the Aboriginal communities, government, and private and nonprofit organizations.

"The first thing we did was prepare a needs assessment," says **Carrie Martin**, co-chair of the NETWORK's Health Committee. "We surveyed people in the community as well as service providers to determine what needs existed, if and how they were being met, and what was required in the future to address shortcomings in the system."

While mainstream services appear to meet the general needs of the community, fully half of those questioned are not satisfied with how healthcare services are administered to Aboriginal persons. Many cited barriers to services accessibility and have experienced language discrimination and cultural insensitivity. In turn, service providers admitted to lacking knowledge or holding preconceived ideas about Native peoples.

Aboriginal participants identified having a good social network, finding a "home", as the key to maintaining good health and wellbeing. But the cultural diversity of Montreal makes it difficult for an Aboriginal person to establish roots.

The survey results were conclusive: there are sufficient gaps and inequities in current health services delivery to warrant creation of a "culturally competent", fully functional, Aboriginal holistic health centre in Montreal. "We've now drawn up a formal proposal for the centre," says Martin, "which we'll be giving to the *Ministre délégué aux Affaires autochtones* and to the *CSSS de la Montagne*. Both have shown interest in our project. It will take time but we're very optimistic that it will happen."

Seniors research started

A breakthrough research project studying the province's English-speaking seniors began in March. Sponsored by the Quebec Community Groups Network and the Quebec English-speaking Communities Research Network, it is the first such investigation yet undertaken. The aim is to establish a credible knowledge base for this vulnerable population that will help influence the decision-making and practice of the agencies concerned with seniors policies and programs in the province. The ultimate goal is to improve the seniors' lives.

A unique feature of this two-year project is that it will involve seniors themselves, who will be trained to do research in their own communities. "They'll conduct surveys and interviews," says **Joanne Pockock**, lead researcher. "And when information is compiled and conclusions made, it is they who will be providing feedback to their peers."

There are 132,500 English-speakers over the age of 65 in Quebec.

Tax incentives for charity

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance has issued a report favourable to Canadian charities. Its *Tax Incentives for Charitable Giving in Canada*, tabled in February, provides 12 recommendations for the government to improve the current taxing situation so as to contribute to raising the level of charitable donations in the country. Among the committee's proposals are such ideas as eliminating or lowering the capital gains tax on charitable donations, and extending the carry-forward period for claiming a charitable donation.

The Committee advised the government to remind and educate Canadians about existing tax incentives for charitable donations and their benefits; to encourage the development of government-community partnerships; and to reduce the "red tape burden" on charitable organizations. The full report is available at www.parl.gc.ca/FINA-e.

Elder abuse program affected

SAVA, Shelter and Assistance for Victims of Elder Abuse, is another victim of government cutbacks. The province's first, and only, shelter for abused seniors, SAVA was set up in 2011 with two apartments in a seniors' residence in NDG. As well as emergency shelter, abused seniors have been provided with counseling and accompaniment services. But as of June, this refuge will be closed.

"We do have funds to continue providing accompaniment until 2015," says **Thurza Dufresne**, coordinator of SAVA. "We're now looking for alternative accommodation, but there are not many beds available. Most residences require total autonomy, but many abuse victims use canes and often need help with such activities as dressing. We had hoped to expand this service; we're still discussing possibilities for establishing other shelters in the area." For information: 514 903 3550.

Together for Black youth

"You can't do it alone". Since Montreal's Black Community Resource Centre opened 18 years ago, the emphasis has been on partnering with other community organizations to achieve community goals. "We look for positive ways to solve problems collectively," affirms **Dorothy Williams**, newly appointed executive director. "And everything we do is about youth."

Williams points to the very successful Expressin' Life, an image-building program for Black girls as a prime example. "It was in eight schools across the city and brought us together with the school board and local community groups. Unfortunately, it was only funded for one year."

Another project on the Centre's drawing board is a legal education program. "Kids should understand their legal rights, but also their responsibilities," says Williams. "Given the right information, they'll know how to handle themselves appropriately in difficult situations." For information: 514 342 2247.

Auberge is 30 years old

Auberge Madeleine, an East End shelter for women in difficulty, is marking its 30th anniversary by moving into more spacious quarters. From the current 19 places, there will be 26 available for women seeking refuge from violent or distressful situations. They not only receive temporary shelter, but also emotional support and assistance in getting attention for their particular healthcare needs.

"What is most significant about the new shelter," says **Micheline Cyr**, director, "is that we'll be able to offer private rooms instead of shared accommodation. Our residents are women in distress so privacy is very important to their recuperation."

Over the years, Auberge Madeleine has helped some 10,000 women, their ages ranging from 18 to 83. "Some of the older clients have been thrown out of residences because of behavioural problems," Cyr explains. "We let them stay a little longer while we find accommodation. For younger residents, we hold workshops to help them look for stable housing."

Care goes beyond temporary shelter. "Maybe the biggest service we provide residents comes after they leave," says Cyr. "It's so important for them to have stability in their new lives. We help them look after themselves, with their shopping and cooking, and we check on their state of health. Ex-residents can come back for meals and for consultations and to continue participating in our group activities."

While government subsidies for the shelter have not been cut this year, operational costs continue to rise. "The cost of food has soared in the past couple of years," says Cyr. "For organizations like ours that provide meals it's become a major concern."

Another is the dramatic increase in the number of women who have had to be turned away. "Last year we counted 5,000 refusals for shelter," Cyr says. "All the shelters are experiencing the same situation. We've joined forces to bring this to the government's attention. It's not a problem that's going to go away."

More mental health support

The CSSS de la Montagne has just received a sizeable sum from the Montreal Health and Social Services Agency to organize a team of its professionals to work with downtown Montrealers recuperating from severe mental illness. Community organizations will be involved.

Bureau calls for bids

The Volunteer Bureau of Montreal is repeating its very successful volunteer recruitment program of last year, Timeraiser Montreal. It is an auction where people bid on works of art and pay for them with hours of volunteer work. Organizations from different sectors of the community present their needs to business professionals who can choose which best matches their interests and skills. Successful bidders only receive their art after they have completed the hours pledged.

At this year's auction, the Bureau is aiming to increase the number of works of art from last year's 24 to 30, the number of visitors from 300 to 400, and the total number of volunteering hours pledged from 6,500 to 8,000. The auction will be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday April 25 at the Bonsecours Market, 350 St-Paul Street East.

Volunteer Week turns 70

Canada's official recognition of volunteers began in 1943 with a Volunteer Week to recognize the vital contribution women on the home front were making to the War effort. The program lapsed after the War ended, but was revived in the late '60s when organizations wanted to stress the importance of thanking their volunteers. Volunteer Week is now considered the largest celebration of civic participation in the country.

Volunteer Canada offers a campaign kit for the Week providing tools and best practices, and has an online gift shop where organizations can purchase commemorative items at: www.volunteer.ca.

In brief

Gaston Bouchard has been named interim president and executive director of the Foundation of Greater Montreal.

Christine Boyle will serve as executive director of both the Constance Lethbridge Rehabilitation Centre and the MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre when the two institutions merge in July.

Anna Farrow has been appointed executive director of the English-Speaking Catholic Council.

Micheline Jodoin has been named interim director of the Constance Lethbridge Rehabilitation Centre.

Marie-Claude Mainville is the new director-general of NOVA Montreal.

Patrick Murphy-Lavallée is joining the Montreal Health and Social Services Agency as director of Professional Services.

Dorothy Williams has been named executive director of the Black Community Resource Centre.

The Lighthouse Children and Families has won the Minister of Health and Social Services' Coup de Coeur award for its work with families of children suffering from life-threatening illness.

The CSSS de Dorval-Lachine-LaSalle has won a Ministry of Health and Social Services award for its perinatal bereavement program.

Volunteer Week is being held from April 21 to 27. The theme this year is Passion, Action, Impact.

An AMI-Quebec free tele-workshop, The shame of elder abuse, will be held on April 17 from 7-8 p.m. To register in advance: www.careringvoice.com.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309

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