

## Seniors studies stunning

Recent studies on services for seniors have raised some serious issues. Senior poverty levels in general are rising; healthcare services for English-speaking seniors in Quebec are problematic; and Montreal seniors are being short-changed on services delivery.

Close to 70 percent of Quebec's anglophone seniors live in the Greater Montreal area. "But Montreal is treated as just another of the province's 16 regions," says **Tom Boushel**, CCS board chair. "The other regions actually have more government funding and more resources for seniors. Which leaves us – as well as the city's francophone seniors – seriously deprived on several fronts."

But there is hope on the horizon. The newly launched Seniors Action Quebec has taken up the cause of advocating for anglophone seniors. A province-wide network, the SAQ aims to address issues affecting seniors and to work to promote the vitality of that sometimes forgotten community.

Another important initiative is the in-depth study undertaken by the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) to gather crucial data on English-speaking Quebec seniors. Seniors themselves have been meeting with peers to gather facts and perceptions on the current situation and proposals for remedial action. Results are scheduled for 2015.

In the meantime, the Commissioner of Official Languages has taken up the cause by ordering a study of how federal departments and agencies fare in providing services to Quebec anglophone seniors and their organizations. He recommends that federal institutions take into account the particular needs of Quebec anglophone seniors by consulting with them on policies and programs and by identifying funding opportunities for them.

Still, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) warns that poverty among Canada's seniors, especially women, is on the rise. And that current pension safety nets may be inadequate to address that problem.

## Youth study shocking

Young English-speaking Montrealers are having major difficulties entering the job market and, as a result, they are increasingly suffering from depression, stress and low self-esteem. That is the conclusion of a study commissioned by Youth Employment Services (YES), a non-profit agency that provides job-search services to the English-speaking community. The study was funded by the Community Health and Social Services Network.

"We've been observing a steady increase in these negative reactions among our clients over the years," says **Iris Unger**, YES executive director. "Now the issues themselves are creating a barrier to our young people being able to get employment."

Among English-speaking youth aged 15 to 24 in the Montreal area, some 43 percent are not yet in the labour force. Despite high levels of bilingualism, their unemployment rate is one-third higher than for their francophone counterparts. Many have been searching for work for up to two years. The longer it takes, the more their anxiety increases.

The YES report provides evidence that resources that could help prevent major mental issues are not adequate to meet the current needs. "We hope our report will move governments and agencies working in mental health, youth and employment to work together to develop preventive measures that would reap long-term benefits," concludes Unger. "It would not only benefit the individuals, but ultimately the economy and the healthcare system".

## Hospitals committee named

With Montreal's two super hospitals on their way to completion, a committee has been set up to make recommendations on the future use of the hospitals to be closed. Chair is **Marie Lessard**, professor of urban planning at Université de Montréal; the other two members are **Claude Corbo**, rector of UQAM, and architect **Cameron Charlebois**. The committee will "consult people in the milieu".

## Centraide president's first year

When **Lili-Anna Pereša** took over the top job at Centraide of Greater Montreal last January, she did not arrive empty-handed. An electrical engineering graduate of École Polytechnique, the new president/executive director brought with her over 20 years of experience in local and international social services management. After a year at the Centraide helm, what are the president's major impressions and her outlook for the future?

“My first revelation was how engaged everyone is – our employees, our agency workers, our army of volunteers. There is so much dedication to the cause.

“It's so disturbing to realize that nearly 23 percent of Montrealers live below the poverty line. We're going to continue supporting early interventions with children and young families, to help break the cycle of poverty.

“Our strategic decisions and social investments are based on in-depth analysis of neighbourhoods. It's important that our agencies follow through by measuring the effectiveness of their projects, to evaluate how they've changed peoples' lives.

“I was very conscious coming into this job that philanthropy has been changing, and changing rapidly. People have become more prudent with their donations and, particularly in workplace campaigns, have many worthy causes from which to choose. The difference is that we represent 369 of them.

“It's crucial that we embrace new technologies to better explain the quality of our agencies' work to a generation that is not used to the idea of giving. We're looking at different tools not only to attract new donors, but also to retain our loyal benefactors.

“I strongly believe in the strength of networks. We're in constant communication and work in tandem with other organizations to maximize our charitable investments. It's the collective impact of the whole community working together that will eliminate poverty in our city.”

## Foundation grants growing

The Foundation of Greater Montreal (FGM) has awarded over \$1.5 million to nonprofit organizations this year. Fifty community organizations shared \$455,000; the McGill University Health Centre (MUHC) received \$980,000.

The Foundation's grants program provides funding for projects or program-based initiatives aimed at improving the quality of life in Greater Montreal. It is supported by donors – nonprofit organizations, individuals, families and corporations – who have created funds within the FGM. Proceeds from these investments are distributed either as the FGM chooses or in areas designated by the donor.

Over 300 community organizations applied for grants this year. Among the fifty that were chosen, Camp Amy Molson received \$10,000 to expand its farm project, designed to teach youngsters about healthful food. The MUHC gift came from an individual donor who wished to support research in heart disease, vascular surgery and ovarian cancer.

The FGM, founded in 1999, manages over 400 funds worth over \$144 million. To date it has distributed grants totaling over \$10 million. For further information: [www.fgmtl.org](http://www.fgmtl.org).

## Hunger counts high

Latest figures from the national March Hunger Count show that while the number of Canadians using food banks dropped slightly during 2013, they are still at a level unequalled since the 2008 recession. Over 833,000 Canadians called upon this help. During the same period 4,342,000 meals were provided by soup kitchens and other such programs.

The number of Quebecers using food banks is up 28 percent over 2008. In Montreal 135,000 people required some type of emergency assistance from Montreal Harvest, the largest supplier. Food Banks Canada notes that the total number is likely much higher given the city's poverty levels.

## OBM/McGill study homeless

A breakthrough research project on chronically homeless Montrealers could bring important changes to their situation and to shelters that house them. The McGill School of Social Work and the Old Brewery Mission (OBM) are collaborating on a five-year project studying the most chronic users of Quebec's largest homeless shelter.

"We've found that 19 percent of OBM clients are using up to 68 percent of the beds," explains McGill's **David Rothwell**, leader of the study. "This has major implications for the delivery of services. Who are these long-stayers, why do they need to stay so long and to what extent are the present services helping them towards self-sufficiency? This is a population with a unique set of needs; we need to understand them better."

Now at the midway point, the study has already brought some change. "A major outcome of this exercise," says Rothwell, "is the organizational and cultural shift taken by the OBM toward a more evidence-based approach to its services. Even our preliminary findings are starting to have an impact."

The final report, scheduled for 2016, will be shared with other homeless service providers. "Our findings are going to be applicable throughout the homeless services network," affirms Rothwell.

## Giving Laval caregivers a hand

Starting in January, caregivers of anglophone seniors in Laval will doubly benefit from a new program run by the Youth and Parents AGAPE Association. They will be offered individual and peer emotional support, as well as respite time from their cares. "To date there have been no such services for anglophone caregivers here," says **Ian Williams**, project coordinator. "We're working with francophone organizations that are adapting their elder programs for our English-speaking seniors. We're a small agency, but the need is so great, we'll be doing this program after hours."

## New CSSS mental illness team

A new team of health professionals from CSSS de la Montagne is now assisting Montrealers suffering from severe and persistent psychological problems to lead stable lives in the community. The interdisciplinary group works in downtown, Côte-des-Neiges/NDG and Park Extension.

"It's not a new concept," says **Marlene Yuen**, project coordinator. "Similar teams are operating elsewhere, but they are attached to hospitals. We are unique because it's the first time that a community health agency has taken on this role."

The team will meet and work with clients in their natural environment. "Our work is very intensive and very focused," says Yuen. "The ultimate goal is to keep these people at home and out of the ER." For further information: 514 731 5386, ext 2120.

## Keeping couples together

Should couples have to split up when one partner loses autonomy and requires extra care? The answer in Repentigny is no. An innovative, community-driven housing project in that city is designed to provide all the support and backup the caregiving partner requires to sustain the couple together. The Coopérative de Solidarité du Petit Village is a subsidized housing venture that will provide 100 apartments at modest rents for eligible couples.

"The beauty of this project is the extent of its community involvement," says **Ghyslaine Prata**, vice president of the Coop board. "The people sitting on the board are community members with a wide range of experience in health and social services. Community partners involved in maintaining services for the tenants include the local healthcare institutions, pharmacies, lots of inter-generational volunteers. There will be all kinds of other backup.

"This is not a healthcare facility," emphasizes Prata. "It's community living with readily available healthcare services." For information: 450 585 7416.

## OBM has been busy

It was a busy year for the Old Brewery Mission (OBM). In its 2012-2013 round-up, the OBM reports delivery of over 269,000 meals and distribution of 33,593 articles of clothing. The Mission provided some 118,000 overnight stays in its emergency shelters and transition units. There were 636 clients who successfully passed through OBM's transition programs to be re-integrated into the community.

In May, the Mission opened Canada's first treatment centre for homeless patients diagnosed with Hepatitis C. A walk-in medical clinic was opened in October.

## Volunteers invited to remember

The Atwater Library and Computer Centre will be launching a new project in January to help people with memory loss make a digital record of significant things in their life. The material would include any memories of bygone years, in such forms as family photos or yearbook pictures, music selections or video clips. The end product will be a CD as a "virtual memory box" celebrating the client's life. The hope is that the CD will later trigger memories and stimulate conversation. Contact **Liz Perrin** at: [liz@atwaterlibrary.ca](mailto:liz@atwaterlibrary.ca).

## Interpreters galore

The Montreal Health and Social Services Agency boasts a busy bank of interpreters. And for good reason: over one-third of Montrealers speak neither French nor English as a first language. The five most requested languages are Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Vietnamese and Punjabi.

There are thirty interpreters and translators on staff, backed up by 107 freelancers. Together they provide service in 43 languages. During the last year, 23,400 allophones used the interpretation services. This Agency department, set up in 1993, now also serves the regions of Laval and Montérégie.

## In brief

**Ralph Dadoun** is interim CEO of St. Mary's Hospital Centre.

**Cynthia Dow** was elected president of the provincial English-language services advisory committee.

**Yvon Gauthier** was named president/executive director of the Foundation of Greater Montreal.

**Lesley Hill** was appointed new executive director of Batshaw Youth and Family Services.

Dr. **Lawrence Rosenberg** was appointed director of the Jewish General Hospital.

The Old Brewery Mission has been awarded the Prix d'Excellence for its transition program for the homeless, Le Pont, by the Ministry of Health and Social Services.

Post-Secondary Student Mental Health, a guide for faculty members and health professionals, is available from the Canadian Association of College and University Students at [www.cacuss.ca](http://www.cacuss.ca).

Two manuals on group volunteering, one for organizations and volunteer centres, the other for groups wanting to volunteer, are available from Volunteer Canada at [www.volunteer.ca](http://www.volunteer.ca).

Visitors to the website of Centraide of Greater Montreal can each trigger a \$1.00 donation from a benefactor by clicking on [www.centraide-mtl.org](http://www.centraide-mtl.org).

McGill University is opening a new \$18 million clinic for people without dental insurance.

Next year the Royal Victoria Hospital will be 140 years old; the Children's, 110; St. Mary's, 90.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309

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