

Developments at Deaf School

The Montreal Oral School for the Deaf (MOSD) is making some changes this year. Its elementary school classes will be coming home to headquarters and its outreach services are set to reach out even further. This venerable institution – founded in 1950 – continues to pioneer as Quebec’s only institution for anglophone hearing-impaired children.

“We work with over 200 children a year,” says **Mary Reynolds**, executive director and principal. “What makes us unique is that we provide therapeutic and clinical services in an auditory /verbal education, while following the regular school curriculums. That is our expertise.”

The MOSD operates four programs: the one for parents and infants and a pre-school for three- and four-year olds are run in-house. For the past 25 years the MOSD has operated an elementary school in Westmount Park School. But that space is no longer available, so starting this fall elementary students will be taught at headquarters.

“Our goal is always to integrate children into mainstream schools as soon as they are ready,” says Reynolds. “That can occur at any stage of their time with us. But they do have to be ready by the end of grade six. Once they are integrated, our staff specialists continue to monitor them and also provide pertinent training to their teachers.”

That is the School’s fourth program, itinerant services. In any given year, there are about 145 hearing-impaired students being monitored by MOSD staff in Montreal and across the province. Now that practice is entering a new phase.

“Its prospects are really exciting,” says Reynolds. “We’ve developed a tele-practice to provide our services to children and their schools online. We’re doing a pilot project that should give us definitive proof of its viability by next year. Then we approach the Ministry of Education for support to implement it permanently. Results so far have been so positive, I’m totally optimistic it will carry through.”

New volunteer awards

Next fall the Volunteer Bureau of Montreal will introduce a slate of brand new volunteer awards. They will be presented at what will become an annual event to recognize the outstanding volunteer action of Montreal organizations and individuals. There will be five categories of recipients: innovative volunteer; volunteers manager; volunteer personality; employer-supported volunteering; and collective volunteering,

Nominations will be submitted by the Bureau’s members, with three nominations in each category, and judged by a group of independent assessors for each category. The first annual awards ceremony will be held during Volunteer Week next April. That occasion will also mark the 80th anniversary gala of the Bureau at which three individuals will be honoured – an employee, a volunteer and a board director, as well as one member organization – who have made a particularly remarkable contribution to volunteerism over the past 25 years.

Centraide funding options

Since its founding in 1974, Centraide of Greater Montreal has given over one billion dollars to the community. This year it will be issuing \$40.8 million to 350 community agencies and projects fighting poverty and social exclusion. In addition, \$1.6 million is being directed to 17 neighbourhoods through partnership with eight major foundations. It is part of the Collective Impact Project which supports actions that those neighbourhoods have identified as poverty-reducing ventures.

The Collective Impact Project represents a new way of supporting the development of communities. The participating foundations have committed to contributing \$22.5 million to Centraide over five years to launch new collective projects aimed at breaking the cycle of poverty in neighbourhoods. Montreal is a prime target for such consideration: nearly one out of four Montrealers has low-income status, among the highest rate of all Canadian cities.

Getting generations together

Collective Community Services (CCS) has just completed a pilot project designed to bring older and younger people together to share reminiscences about life in Montreal past. The Intergenerational Video Project is one of many celebrating Canada's 150th birthday. This work focusses on what seniors have contributed to the country's history. At the same time, it is designed to address both the isolation of seniors from their communities, and also the alienation of disaffected youth.

"We think this exercise has been an important engagement between young and elder participants," says **Steven Valin**, project manager. "By interacting for the first time, each has become more aware of the other. Bringing the generations together really fostered empathy and understanding between them."

Fifty young people between the ages of 12 and 21 and three seniors from three different communities – Saint-Michel, Shawville and Ville Saint-Laurent – participated in the project: The young volunteers were drawn from alternative schools in urban and rural settings. They chose their senior interviewees.

"They researched to find a distinct voice from each of the communities," Valin explains, "someone with a story to tell about an earlier Canada. Over six months, they were coached by two professional filmmakers on how to conduct a proper interview, how to shoot and edit the video, how to handle lighting. It was a real hands-on learning experience. And it certainly increased their self-confidence."

The three videos run between 5 and 7 minutes. They will be used as conversation starters by citizens and agencies at community meetings convened to determine strategies to reduce isolation among seniors. And there will be more.

"It's been a home run for us," Valin affirms. "And the idea has so much potential for other communities. We're now planning a similar project with the Mohawk community of Kahnawake." For information: 514 416 5796.

Strategy 75 for N.D.G.

The community issues that first spurred citizens of N.D.G. to join forces in war-time 1942 were juvenile delinquency, lack of affordable housing and the need for recreational parks. For the next 75 years, the N.D.G. Community Council has become noted for stimulating a striking degree of community involvement in dealing with these and many other community needs that have arisen over time. Several successful action committees were spun off into independent organizations, such as the Food Depot and Senior Citizens' Council. But there have been so many changes in N.D.G recently that the Council is producing a strategic plan for future action.

"The biggest change we're experiencing is the soaring increase in the number of immigrants over the past five years," explains **Halah Al-Ubaidi**, executive director. "Nearly half the population of 67,000 is made up of recent arrivals. We've become a highly diverse community; our social development file is even more complex than in the past."

There are outstanding socioeconomic issues: schools are overflowing, with children being bused out of the neighbourhood; 25 percent of households fall below the poverty line; there are problems of youth unemployment and delinquency, the plight of single-parent families and the working poor, isolated seniors, food security, and inadequate housing.

"It's not all negative," Al-Ubaidi affirms. "We have built up so many strengths over the years, and enjoy excellent cooperation with public agencies and service providers. Our strength is bringing people together around an issue, looking at needs, and helping build a service that's required. That's what we'll continue to do."

Next on the agenda is a strategic plan for the next five years. The first step was a Quality of Life conference in May that brought N.D.G. community groups and citizens together to discuss the most pressing issues to be tackled. A needs evaluation was distributed in seven languages to over 300 residents. The plan will reflect their concerns.

Aid sought for autistic anglos

When the Quebec Health Ministry launched its action plan covering Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in March, it was greeted with widespread relief and enthusiasm. But for the East Island Network for English-language Services (REISA), something was missing. No provision had been made for including the anglophone community in the government consultation or delivery of services.

“This plan is a practical, well-grounded approach to the issue,” says **Janet Forsyth**, REISA advisor. “It’s particularly noteworthy for its provision of speedy diagnosis, and for financial aid based on the level of functioning of the patient. We wanted English-speakers to be included in those benefits.”

So in April, REISA held a Special Needs forum on the availability of services in English for children with ASD. It was attended by some 40 people from a cross-section of the community. Also present were representatives of three regional health and social services centres (CIUSSSs).

“The basic goal of our forum was to help our public partners better understand the realities of language-minority parents with special needs children,” says Forsyth. “We also wanted to show them that our community can make a significant contribution to making the new plan a reality.”

They listened. “The CIUSSS de l’est-de-l’Île-de-Montréal is now planning a consultation with our community,” says Forsyth. “And the CIUSSSs du Nord and du Centre-Sud will be collaborating. All in all, a good day!”

A very special clinic opens

A new clinic has opened in Montreal to provide medical treatment for people with no healthcare coverage. Operated by the nonprofit Médecins du Monde Canada, it serves undocumented migrants, and others having difficulty accessing the public system. For information: 514 281 8998.

Children’s service restored

Quebec is now back in the fold. For over 35 years, the province had an ongoing service contract with International Social Service Canada (ISS Canada), a national nonprofit agency that provides inter-country liaison among social work practitioners concerned with children who need to be placed or reunited with families between countries. This international service was widely used by this province’s child welfare agencies.

Following reformation of the healthcare system in this province, however, that service contract was inadvertently suspended as agencies were integrated into the new health and social services centres. Now three of those centres have initiated renewal of the international service. The West Island CIUSSS, CIUSSS du Centre-Sud and CISSS de la Montérégie-Est have coordinated a joint contract with ISS Canada by which all the other Quebec centres will again be able to access its services.

Seniors poverty studied

Seniors Action Quebec (SAQ) held a special consultation in May on poverty among seniors. Some 115 individuals and representatives of groups working with the older population gathered to discuss what seniors’ poverty actually looks like and to determine what can be done to improve the lot of the most vulnerable.

Among the broad topics discussed were: different aspects of housing – accessibility and affordability in general, and alternatives such as shared homes and cooperative housing; the impact of day to day expenses and financial abuse; the importance of proper nutrition and social activities; mental health issues and the needs and wellbeing of caregivers.

The ultimate goal of these discussions was to prepare recommendations for submission to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to be considered for inclusion in the government’s upcoming Reducing Poverty Strategy.

Costs to consider

According to a recent report by CIBC Capital Markets, caring for aging parents costs Canadians some \$33 billion a year. This figure includes direct out of pocket expenses and time off work. It is expected to grow even larger over time.

It pays to volunteer

A recent study of 1,000 Swedish seniors found that those who volunteer regularly were much less likely to get dementia. The five-year study, of seniors who retired in 2010, concluded that those who volunteered at least an hour a week were 2.4 times less likely to develop dementia than those who did not volunteer. Those who volunteered only sporadically did not see the same benefits. The researchers credit the social, cognitive and physical benefits derived from volunteering as the probable key to this phenomenon.

Looking at anglo literacy

The federal government is sponsoring a new project aimed at developing tools and resources to improve literacy levels and essential skills among official minority-language Canadians to help them succeed in the labour market. Researchers will appraise existing policies, approaches and services and evaluate what needs to be done in the future. In Quebec, **Linda Shohet**, former founder and executive director of the Centre for Literacy, is charged with researching the situation as it applies to the English-speaking minority in this province. For further information: linda.shohet@gmail.com.

More monies for elder abuse

Quebec has just allotted \$45 million to a new five-year plan to counter elder abuse. The goal is to raise public awareness and provide more resources to cope with this widespread problem. A new plus, the elder abuse hotline will be made multilingual.

In brief

Martina Alfonso has been named interim executive director of the Montreal Children's Hospital Foundation.

Louis Audet, president and CEO of Cogeco, and **James C. Cherry**, corporate director and former president and CEO of Aéroports de Montréal, have been named co-chairs of the 2017 fundraising campaign of Centraide of Greater Montreal.

Theodora Brinkman was named executive director of the newly merged MAB/Mackay-Constance Lethbridge Foundation; **Kippy Wiegand** has been named board chair.

Linton Garner was appointed executive director of the Regional Association of West Quebecers.

Andrew Ross was named president of the N.D.G Community Council board of directors.

The Quebec Community Groups Network is calling for nominations for the 2017 Victor and Sheila Goldbloom Distinguished Community Service Awards. Deadline for submissions is July 31. For information: www.qcgn.ca.

The Directory of Food Resources for Low Income People 2017 is available from the Information and Referral Centre of Greater Montreal: 514 527 1375.

REISA has prepared Resources in English for Families with Special Needs: 514 995 8370, # 2217.

To note: CIUSSS and CIUSS board meetings are open to the public. Consult websites for schedules.

The story of Red Feather is available online at <http://redfeathermontreal.ca>.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309.

Legal deposit:
National Library of Canada ISSN 1709 092X
Bibliothèque nationale du Québec