

Aid for vulnerable anglos

The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) has announced 10 innovative projects that will help vulnerable English-speaking seniors to fight isolation and youth to find employment. The projects are to be financed through the Community Innovation Fund with \$1.1 million of federal monies to be dispersed between 2020 and 2023. The fund will be managed and administered by the QCGN.

The organizations whose projects were selected:

- **Camp Weredale**, where young people will be helped to acquire employability and life skills as they transition to independent living
- **Committee for Anglophone Social Action**, to promote the cultural capital of the Gaspé region's English-speaking minority through social enterprise
- **Côte-des-Neiges Black Community Association**, to assist parents in teaching their pre-school children French literacy skills to prepare them for the French school system
- **DESTA Black Youth Network**, technology focused program designed to overcome employment barriers faced by Black English-speaking youth
- **Gay and Grey Montreal**, outreach project for English-speaking LGBTQ seniors
- **Museum of Jewish Montreal**, to establish professional and creative opportunities for vulnerable English-speaking minority youth through fellowships and micro-grants
- **Press Start**, a youth-led cooperative venture to assist marginalized youth explore trades with paid training and mentorships for future employment
- **Project 10**, to expand and restructure its programs of advocacy for Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, and Persons of Color to include Trans-Indigenous persons
- **Suspicious Fish**, to expand its literacy and arts programs for low-income children in Verdun to include youth and adult learners and to promote cross-cultural projects with Kahnawake participants
- **The Depot**, to provide work experience and access to permanent part-time employment for six marginalized youth in N.D.G.

Emergency funds for Covid

To help community organizations cope with unforeseen costs of the Covid 19 pandemic, two of Montreal's leading charitable institutions distributed special emergency funding during the summer.

Centraide of Greater Montreal allocated \$7.1 million in Covid-19 emergency funding to its 441 agencies so that they could meet the needs of vulnerable people hit hard by the health crisis. An additional \$5.1 is to be distributed in September. These extra monies were made possible through designated donations from companies, organizations, foundations, governments and individual donors.

The Foundation of Greater Montreal disbursed \$7.2 million for 209 different projects to aid the most vulnerable and most affected by the pandemic: women, racialized persons, immigrants, the young, the handicapped, caregivers and the elderly.

Centraide also dispersed \$1.5 million to 56 agencies so that over 12,000 isolated and marginalized young people could get help during the summer to continue their studies in preparation for the next school year.

First and largest

Montreal has turned over a prime downtown site and \$4 million to a social housing cooperative to build a low-cost residential project. It will be the largest housing coop in the city in a single building. Construction of the 14-storey building has begun at the corner of St-Jacques and de la Montagne streets, and will open in 2021.

The building will house a community hall and 136 units ranging from one to four bedrooms. The \$19 million project will accommodate up to 70 single residents and 66 families, up to 80 percent from low-income brackets. The Peter McGill Community Council reports that there are 14,000 people living under the poverty line in that district.

Moving to safety

A crucial service for women fleeing situations of domestic abuse is now available in Montreal. Shelter Movers provides free moving assistance and storage of their belongings to women and children seeking protection. Founded in Toronto four years ago, it has since been successfully adopted in several other Canadian cities. Run by volunteers and community partners, it is the only service of its kind in Canada.

“The concept is so simple,” explains **Annia Spakowski**, a founder of the Montreal chapter and coordinator of its volunteer services. “In many cases abused women flee a dangerous situation empty-handed. Shelter Movers collects their belongings and has them stored until a new dwelling is found. That takes a huge weight off their shoulders.”

Under the Shelter Movers model, all volunteers receive careful background checks and are committed to confidentiality. They receive special training on how to deal with women in a strongly emotional state. Moving trucks and storage facilities are donated by community partners.

“We now have enough trucking and individual volunteers to start in mid-September,” Spakowski affirms. “We’re working at first with two shelters that will refer to us clients in need. As we grow our volunteer base and promote our services, no doubt demand will increase. Based on the experience of other chapters, we’ll be called upon to make a lot of moves.” Contact: volunteer.mtl@sheltermovers.com

Awards for volunteers

The federal government has opened nominations for Canada’s Volunteer Awards. Individuals may be nominated in three categories: emerging leader, youth; community leader; or lifelong achievement. Winners will receive \$5,000. Organization awards are for social innovation by a non-profit or social enterprise and for business leader. Winners may designate a nonprofit to receive \$10,000. Deadline is September 30. Contact: 1 877 825 0434.

One Voice, one goal

When they started meeting three years ago, several Montreal area organizations working with isolated English-speaking seniors sought to exchange ideas and discuss mutual challenges. With the onset of the Covid pandemic, their interaction has proven the value of such cooperation. They are now a 15-member group, known as One Voice.

“What’s great about One Voice,” says **Judy Wong**, executive director of Catholic Action Montreal, “is that although they’re all busy putting out fires in their own group, as soon as one member has a new tool available, it is shared with all the others. And when so many centres had to cut their indoor activities they had to be very creative to keep isolated seniors involved.”

The activities have been wide and varied. For those with the technology there have been Zoom virtual gatherings: world trips; visits to museums, theatres and gardens; a virtual tea party; French classes; yoga instruction; book reading. For seniors without computers, there are telephone conference calls on such topics as saving money, sharing recipes as well as hearing guest speakers talking about their interesting lives. Some groups have now started small face to face activities such as an outdoor café, a printing class, and a seven-days-a-week summer camp in someone’s back yard.

There has been one major mutual problem during this time. Volunteer numbers are severely down because those over 70 years old are not going out. The group had to de-activate their bus that handled outside transportation for housebound seniors. And the number of drivers for medical appointments, food pickup, and so on has dropped drastically.

“Our meetings have never been so important,” Wong affirms. “When we first got together we had disparate ideas, but over time the sense of sharing has become so strong. When a problem is identified, we work together to find a solution. We’re a team now; Our Voice is a very cohesive group.”

Black centre revival?

A new movement is under way to restore the historic Negro Community Centre (NCC), once the hub of Montreal's Black community in Little Burgundy. A one-time Red Feather agency, the Centre provided a wide range of social, recreational and cultural activities to Blacks in Montreal.

Unfortunately, the organization ran into financial and operating difficulties in the late '80s and was forced to close in 1994. In 2014, its crumbling stone building was demolished and the property eventually sold to a developer planning to build a residential project on the site. Now a group of local residents is trying to reclaim the land in order to revive the Centre. They see it including an historical and cultural auditorium and reference library, and possibly social housing.

Helping to find homes

A new program to transition homeless persons towards permanent lodging opened in mid-July in the old Royal Victoria Hospital building. The program was organized by the City and five homeless shelters that are working together to insure that the homeless have access to the services they need both during their transition period and after. It is supported with \$7 million of federal funding.

There is room for 175 on two dedicated floors, one with 50 places for men, the other for 40 women. In addition, there is accommodation of 40 places for those with complex medical problems who want to link into the healthcare network before looking for permanent lodging. There is also special space for those affected by the Corona virus.

A key element in preparing for implementation of the housing program was an evaluation of the needs of potential candidates by the Old Brewery Mission and the Welcome Hall Mission. By sounding the 1400 clients using their facilities, they determined those common needs not being met which defined what was required in transition programs.

More resilient seniors

Seniors Action Quebec (SAQ) has introduced the first phase of its resilience training program for English-speaking seniors. It is designed to improve self-confidence and to encourage self-advocacy, particularly when coping with the healthcare system in Quebec. A six-part program, it will be delivered over two years.

“The first sessions are on self-awareness,” says **Mirella Castrechini**, SAQ project coordinator. “Seniors already have a lot of life experience but many don't always recognize their own strengths. This program includes tests and exercises that allow them to build on what they already have with perseverance and commitment.”

The first stage is “train the trainer” sessions for people in organizations serving English-speaking seniors. They in turn will train seniors in the various components of the program. It will thereafter be easily accessible online, for free. For information: SAQ.org.

Aid for Indigenous children

The federal government has passed an amendment to the Indigenous Youth and Families Act that sets out a framework for Indigenous communities to develop and assume their own child welfare systems. It is estimated that the total cost of transition could reach \$3.5 billion.

A basic goal of the new legislation is to further avoid having Indigenous children taken from their family and community. The current situation has been deemed a humanitarian crisis. Indigenous children account for seven percent of the country's population under the age of 15, but in 2016, half of Canadian children in foster care were Indigenous.

In the meantime, agreement of the provinces poses a challenge. Quebec, for example, will be contesting the constitutionality of the new law.

Charities struggling

According to Imagine Canada, this country's charitable sector needs \$10 billion to survive effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Increased demand for their services coupled with a severe decrease in revenues will have dire consequences.

Imagine's projections indicate a decrease of some \$1.6 billion will lead to close to 200,000 layoffs. The impact on this country's economy will be far-reaching: overall, the charitable sector contributes 8.5 percent of Canada's GDP and employs 2.4 million people, 70 percent of whom are women.

De-confinement planning

With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, many community organizations had to close down or reduce operations very significantly. Some are now feeling pressure to resume their services and reopen their facilities to their clients. The coalition of community organizations regional tables (COTROC) has prepared guidelines as to when and how to de-confine. The Community Health and Social Services Network and Literacy Quebec have provided the Coalition with an English translation for distribution to the English-speaking community. It is available at: COTROC.org/bulletins.

Food surplus distribution

The federal government has announced a \$50 million program that will direct perishable food products to vulnerable people during the pandemic. It involves 12 million kilograms of food that would otherwise have been wasted due to shutdowns in the restaurant and hospitality industry. At the same time it will help farmers recover the costs of production.

Canada's food banks, which received \$100 million federal funding in April, have been dealing with a major surge in demand and will further benefit from this emergency surplus program.

In brief

Michael M. Fortier and **Anne-Marie Hubert** are co-chairs of the 2020 fund-raising campaign of Centraide of Greater Montreal.

James Hughes has been appointed president and CEO of the Old Brewery Mission.

Karel Mayrand has been named President-CEO of the Foundation of Greater Montreal.

AMI-Quebec is presenting its annual Low Beer Memorial lecture online on October 8 at 7 p.m. Dr. Ronald Miller will give a "pragmatic view of mental illness". To participate: registration@amiquebec.org.

L'appui pour les proches aidants d'âinés offers two services to assist caregivers of older adults: a directory listing available resources by region and a free, confidential and professional telephone consultation service available from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m., seven days a week. Available in English at 1 855 852 7784 or at info-aidant@l'appui.org.

Seniors Action Quebec is hosting a free webinar on the safe use of medication for seniors on Tuesday, September 22 from 9:30 a.m. to 11 a.m. To register: Call 438 386 1944, by September 14.

The Foundation of Greater Montreal has released a special issue of its Vital Signs of Greater Montreal which summarizes the evolution of the region's social needs over the past 20 years. It is available at fgmtl.org/signesvitaux.

A new health information website is accessible at McGill/healthinfosanté.ca.

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

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309

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