

Massive move under way

The much feared and disputed legislation outlining total transformation of Quebec's health and social services system was adopted by the National Assembly on February 6. It comes into effect on April 1. The intent, as described by the Ministry, is to reorganize the system "from a network of establishments to a network of patient services".

The reorganization procedure entails massive change: regional health and social services agencies are abolished and all but 12 public institutions across the province are to be merged to create Integrated Health and Social Services Centres (CISSS) or CIUSSS if they have a university affiliate. From 182 institutions, there will be 22: 13 CISSSs and nine CIUSSSs. There will be one integrated centre per region except for Montreal, which will have five; the Montérégie, which will have three; and Gaspésie-des-Îles, which will have two.

There are 12 institutions not affected by this legislation: two associated with l'Université Laval in Quebec; five in Montreal: the MUHC, the CHUM, l'Institut de cardiologie, Sainte-Justine Hospital Centre and the Philippe Pinel Institute; and five institutions in the Far North.

Montreal's new look

The Montreal region will be served by five CIUSSSs. Of direct interest to anglophones, seven institutions are merged under the West Island CIUSSS: the West Island Health and Social Services Centre (CSSS), the Dorval-Lachine-LaSalle CSSS, St. Mary's Hospital, the Douglas Institute, Grace Dart Extended Care, West Montreal Readaptation Centre, and Batshaw Youth and Family Centres.

The Cavendish and de-la-Montagne CSSSs; the Jewish General and Mount Sinai Hospitals; Maimonides Geriatric Centre; Jewish Eldercare Centre, Constance Lethbridge Rehabilitation Centre and Miriam Home and Services will be merged into the new West-Central CIUSSS.

Anglos fare well so far

Thanks to the herculean efforts of a group of respected and dedicated defenders, the English-speaking community was able to obtain significant modifications to the draft legislation that enable its members to continue playing a role in decisions that affect the community's historic institutions.

A major concession was the granting of bilingual status to the two CIUSSSs serving the West Island and West-Central Montreal. There is a guarantee of English-speaking representation on the boards of every integrated centre across the province. Advisory committees will be compulsory in all of the recognized bilingual institutions whose role is to monitor the protection of social, cultural and linguistic needs of the anglophone population they serve. Every integrated centre will have an access program for services in English and an access advisory committee. Regional access committees will have a new role in identifying anglophones who will sit on the boards of the new CISSSs.

The legislation also protects the integrity of owning corporations of historic anglophone institutions and, importantly, provides them with a veto over any changes in the clinical mission of their institution, liquidation of its assets or any modification of bilingual status.

Jeffery Hale-St Brigid's Centre in the Capital region received special assurance that even though anglophones account for only two percent of the population, the CIUSSS must ensure English representation on its board, and name a director to serve as the link between the Centre, the CIUSSS and the English-speaking community.

However, as of April 1, all institutional boards are abolished. Each integrated centre will have a single board overseeing its merged members. This will eliminate the community's direct involvement in the operation of its historical institutions. Also, all current senior and administrative management positions will be abolished and then reassigned, which could have a major impact on continuity.

New status, new challenge

Youth protection is one of the social services reeling from transformation of Quebec's health and social services system. "The first reaction across our network was shock," says **Lesley Hill**, executive director of Batshaw Youth and Family Centres. "But that was quickly followed by the urgent sense of needing to preserve what we cherish and have built for over 100 years."

Under the new setup, Batshaw will find itself part of the West Island CIUSSS, and will be directed by a newly-appointed administration. (With all current senior positions abolished, Hill must, and will, apply for a management posting.) Batshaw installations will retain their name; the Foundation is not touched by the new law.

"We're permitted to ask for an advisory committee to link between the Foundation and the CIUSSS board," Hill explains. "We've already drawn up its mandate to also include a link with the research community to make sure we retain our important research capacity. We're also gathering together historical archives to ensure that our 100-year presence in the community is protected."

"Change can certainly bring opportunities and we look forward to harnessing them," says Hill, "but there are also huge risks. One of my biggest worries is where child welfare is going to sit in this mega system. Quebec has the most performing youth protection system in Canada. But our association of youth centres, which played a major role in maintaining provincial standards of excellence, is being abolished. I'm also concerned that we might see an exodus of precious expertise."

Public or private?

Private institutions face a different challenge: should they remain outside of, or opt into, the newly organized public healthcare system. The privately-run MAB-Mackay Rehabilitation Centre has chosen inclusion, and is working on a project to integrate into the West-Central CIUSSS.

Homeless no more?

Growing awareness of the human and social cost of homelessness has spurred a flurry of analytical and remedial activities across the country. Montreal is very much keeping pace.

The city's oldest and largest homeless shelter, the Old Brewery Mission (OBM), is on the verge of a major transformation of its services. Facing eventual expropriation of its property for a Palais de Congrès expansion, the OBM plans to set up an emergency assessment and referral centre separate from its shelter. "We'd like to de-couple emergency services from re-integration services," says **Matthew Pearce**, executive director. "We're also very interested in the Montreal Chest Hospital site as potential housing for homeless people reintegrating into society."

More money for mentally-ill homeless

A 2014 government report on homelessness in Quebec led to a 2015-2020 action plan allotting \$12.7 million a year to assist homeless people with mental health issues in four categories: addicts, women, aboriginals, and the elderly. A grant to the CHUM means that women at the OBM shelter can benefit from its very successful PRISM program.

Operated by an interdisciplinary team from the CHUM, the PRISM program has so dramatically reduced the numbers of its own clientele requiring such assistance that the OBM can now accept referrals from the city's other shelters. And with its new funding, the CHUM will serve not just shelter clients but the whole city's homeless. "It's a terrific new resource," Pearce affirms. "This program means that these once homeless people stay connected to the healthcare network, and remain monitored and supported after they reintegrate into society."

Counting quickly

A flash census of homeless in Montreal took place on March 24. Hundreds of volunteers joined outreach workers in surveying people on the street. The idea is to get a "snapshot" of the homeless situation to provide base data for future surveys.

Moving move for Portage

Portage drug rehabilitation centre has transferred its residential treatment program for English-language addicted teens from Beaconsfield to its Laurentian facility. The lease on its West Island site having expired, and unable to find other adequate space, the agency renovated its northern buildings to accommodate the relocated teens. For a time.

“It is our fervent hope, and certainly our plan, that when circumstances permit, we will return to the West Island,” says **Peter Vamos**, executive director. “Fourteen years ago, our program was taken to the bosom of the Beaconsfield community. We are ever so grateful for their having had the vision to welcome a program like ours.”

In the meantime, Portage has set up a satellite office in Pointe-Claire to process admissions and to continue to provide after-care service for reintegrating teens, and to provide support for families. Director of the new facility is Michelle Descoteaux. For information: 514 694 9894.

Catholics coming together

The English-speaking Catholic community of Montreal is at a crossroad. Faced with ever-lessening return on fund-raising efforts, and growing demands for community services, 21 core organizations convened a series of summits to address the issue.

“We concluded that our message was not reaching Catholics,” explains **Andy Malolepszy**, a director of the Father Dowd Foundation. “We benchmarked against campaigns in other cities and found that the successful ones had centralized both their fundraising and their services delivery and had a unified message to donor communities. It was clear we had to do things differently.

“Our discussions were very fruitful,” Malolepszy adds. “They revealed many areas where we could restructure our activities to further our community impact. An action plan will be ready in June.”

Black Centre re-branding

The Black Community Resource Centre, which serves the English-speaking Black community in the Greater Montreal area, is changing its name. It will henceforth be known by its acronym, BCRC. Its mission remains the same.

“That B still represents Black,” affirms **Dorothy Williams**, executive director. “But internally we’ve undergone changes in administration, with a new president, and so the board has decided to move into establishing a more modern image for the Centre.”

Because of reduction in traditional sources of funding, some programming has been curtailed. “But we will be bringing our successful school workshops on the legal system into the community,” says Williams. “Panels on civil rights and responsibilities will be held for adults this spring. Another unique project focuses on Black history and heritage: artists and animators will be working with 20 Black youth to develop videos on people and events that have shaped Black history in Montreal.”

Helping young offenders

Bathshaw Youth and Family Centres has received federal funding to carry out an alternative educational program for high-risk young offenders in its custody. A three-year grant of \$222,000 from Justice Canada will pay for pre-employment training and more vocation-based courses.

“We wanted to go beyond what these kids are offered now, says **Jason Vickers**, program manager, “because they often struggle with mainstream approaches. We’re looking at developing life skills such as literacy, digital literacy and cooking. We’ll also use art, music, drama and writing as therapy and to encourage self-expression. If we can draw them away from negative values by participating in these activities it could lead them to employment instead of gangs after they leave us. We’re also partnering with community-based organizations do follow up on their positive reintegration into the community.”

End-of-life conference

Seniors Action Quebec is holding a day-long conference on End-of-Life Choices on April 27 at La Plaza Hotel. Expert panelists will discuss a variety of pertinent topics including ethics and religious perspectives, medical situations, palliative care, legal and social services. Numerous kiosks will stock supplementary support information. To register: www.seniorsactionquebec.ca

Volunteering, donating recorded

According to Statistics Canada, 44 percent of Canadians volunteered their time and 82 percent gave money to a charitable organization in 2013. In total, they donated \$12.8 billion and almost two billion hours to their volunteer activities. While total time donated declined by three percent, individual donations were up by 14 percent. As usual, Quebecers were on the bottom of the giving scale: only one-third were volunteers, compared to 56 percent in Saskatchewan; average donations were \$264, compared to Alberta's \$863.

First Nations children in need

A recent report on unjust treatment of First Nations children by sitting Canadian governments raises a call for immediate remedial action. Without denial, delay or disruption: Ensuring First Nations children's access to equivalent services ... describes jurisdictional ambiguities and underfunding in health and social services for First Nations children. For information: info@fncaringsociety.com.

Income is not enough

Research by McGill Social Work professor **David Rothwell** concludes that poverty should not be measured by income but by financial assets. He has determined that 55 percent of Canadian households would hit the poverty line within only three months should their income suddenly dry up. For further information: david.rothwell@mcgill.ca.

In brief

Manny Batshaw, after whom the Batshaw Youth and Family Centres is named, celebrated his 100th birthday.

Clarence S. Bayne has been elected president of the board of directors of BCRC (Black Community Resources Centre).

Benoît Morin has been named president-director general of the new Centre intégré de santé et services sociaux (CIUSSS) de l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal.

Dr. **Lawrence Rosenberg** has been named president-director general of the new Centre intégré de santé et services sociaux (CIUSSS) du Centre-Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal.

Nico Trocmé, director of the McGill School of Social Work, has won a \$50,000 Social Services and Humanities Research Council award for his 25 years as a leading advocate for youth.

Centraide of Greater Montreal raised \$55 million in its 2014 campaign, which sum will support 360 community organizations.

The Gingras-Lindsay Rehabilitation Centre was recognized by Accreditation Canada for excellence in clinical innovation and leadership in the care of stroke victims.

National Volunteer Week, themed Volunteers are part of the ripple effect, will be held April 12-18.

The Council on Palliative Care is offering three free workshops, each at 8 p.m., on hospitals, medicine and quality care on April 13, 20 and 27 at Temple Emanu-El-Bet-Sholom, 4100 Sherbrooke Street, West. For information: fmpa202@aol.com.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309.

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