

Olympian aid for M-M Centre

It did not take long for the MAB-Mackay Foundation to hit the million dollar mark in its recent campaign to support adapted sports programs for children with physical disabilities. Along with significant private donations from the community, a major spur came from Olympic ski champion **Alexandre Bilodeau**. Inspired by his brother who suffers from cerebral palsy, Bilodeau heads a fundraising group that finances sports programs for children with special needs. His monies to the M-M Rehabilitation Centre are dedicated particularly to pilot programs that evaluate new activities. “We feel very privileged for him to be part of our campaign,” says **Theodora Brinkman**, executive director. “That he will continue partnering with us means that we’ll be able to do even more for this important program.”

Wheelchair tennis and basketball, luge hockey and horseback riding are among the adapted sports activities on the regular agenda for M-M clients. With new monies, a pilot cycling program was tried this year. It was so successful that this sport is now one of the centres’ rehabilitation activities. The therapeutic value for children with physical impairments of being able to participate in sports are well documented. Physical activity promotes balance and coordination, increases cognitive skills and strategic thinking. Participants learn teamwork and gain self-esteem. Most of all, they escape the social isolation that so many otherwise experience.

Merger on the way

Another significant development at M-M is that on January 1, 2017, a new foundation will come into being. To be known initially as the MAB-Mackay-Constance Lethbridge Foundation, the new entity will merge three pillars of the English-speaking community health and social services history. “The new organization, which will also include Camp Massiwippi, will subsequently get a new name,” explains Brinkman, “but we are very conscious of the need to respect and nurture the histories involved. We’re the stewards of our pedigree.”

Caring for youth in care

When young people who have been in protective housing or foster care reach 18, they are no longer eligible to receive youth protection services. But many are quite unprepared for independent living. Two recent initiatives seek to provide some assistance in their transition to independence.

The Batshaw Youth and Family Centres Foundation is sponsoring a pilot program for coming-of-age youth in care that provides them with housing and back-up support and resources. Five young people 17 to 25 years old will be housed in a Batshaw owned dwelling, supervised by a live-in mentor, and coached by Batshaw staffers. They can stay for up to two years.

“They’ll be receiving such basic training as cooking and life skills and how to budget,” explains **Judith Obodia**, director of new development. “They’ll explore possibilities for further education and future employment. Overall, the goal is to prepare them to lead a healthy lifestyle, to be emotionally and socially self-sufficient. At the end of their stay, they’ll get help with a housing search, and even supplies like pots and pans and bus fare.”

A key feature of this Foundation-sponsored program is the coordination of a network of community resources to which the youth will have access for further support once they are on their own. The first new tenants arrive in January. Currently there are 462 Batshaw youth in care.

Another initiative aimed at the same demographic is a new network founded by former youth in care that is designed “to provide a safe and non-judgmental community that encourages youth in care to network, support and advocate for each other”. Called Montreal Youth in Care Alumni Association (MYCASA), its first target is in care alumni attending post-secondary school in Montreal. Current and former youth in care, as well as adult supporters, can also apply for membership. For information: mycasa.aejpm@gmail.com.

Doors opening on adoptions

Quebec has introduced legislation on the rights of adopted children to learn about their birth identity and medical history and for birth parents to have information concerning their adopted children. Adoptees' identity will be protected until they reach full age, but that of birth parents may be disclosed to an adopted child who is at least 14 years old, unless the birth parent registers a veto within 18 months of the law taking effect. Medical information will be available without any need for justification. The new law also recognizes aboriginal customary adoption.

Batshaw Youth and Family Centres is responsible for all English and Jewish adoption records in Montreal. "We have a waiting list in the thousands," says **Manuella Piovesan**, program manager for adoption search and reunion. "Eighty percent of searches are outside Quebec because so many English-speakers have left the province. It's a real detective job because some people are living at opposite ends of the world. It used to take up to 10 years to find them; now it's about a year and a half."

The investigations are conducted by Batshaw's professional social workers. So, too, is counselling of the parties who would like to meet. "We give adoptees their parent's psychosocial background, medical history and reasons for relinquishment at birth but no names," says Piovesan. "For the birth mother, we give the child's medical history but only general information about the adoptive family. When they do want a reunion, we prepare them with separate counselling, and assist at the meeting if they request it. There is a lot of heartache associated with adoptions, but by and large these are happy stories. It's the most amazing work."

Births galore

The West Island Health and Social Services Centre (CIUSSS) boasts the highest number of births in the province. Its combined obstetric services welcomed some 10,000 newcomers during the past year. St. Mary's Hospital topped the list with 4,200.

Investing in innovation

A new federal government fund is providing \$4 million of support for innovative projects designed to improve the lot of official minority language communities across the country. Combined with compulsory private sector contributions, that sum would be trebled so that the total designated for English-speaking nonprofits in Quebec could reach up to \$3 million.

The program here is being managed by the Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN), which will sponsor social initiatives aimed at securing basic socioeconomic security for vulnerable English-speaking youth, seniors, caregivers and newcomers. It is hoped that collaboration with the private sector will create and strengthen long-term partnerships to the benefit of the vitality of the province's English-speaking minority.

Minorities' health an issue

A national colloquium on the health status of Canadian official minority language communities will be held in Ottawa in February. The second such gathering sponsored by Health Canada - the first seven years ago - will compare the state of health research and access to health care between Quebec anglophones and those in the rest of Canada, Quebec francophones and those in the rest of Canada, and between Quebec anglophones and francophones. Human resources, best practices, integration of bilingual health professionals, support measures for individuals within the health system will be examined. The goal is to set future directions for federal policy and contribution programs.

In the meantime, a report recently compiled on the health status of people in l'Estrie region shows that anglophones have a generally poorer state of health and lifestyle habits than their francophone neighbours. Much of the situation was attributed to the fact that the minority population in this rural area had avoided seeking help for fear of not being understood in English.

CCS: what's in a name?

The CCS – Collective Community Services – has completed its first year under a new name, new orientation and new leader. For 84 years known as Catholic Community Services, the agency continues to serve the broader community, but with changes in programming and an emphasis on the Southwest part of the city.

“Over half our 4,000 clients are in Verdun and LaSalle,” says **Vaughan Roche**, Chief Operating Officer, “so we’ve moved our operation into that area. Programs for seniors and adults have been spun off, and we’ve been expanding our child and family services, youth and camp programs and social health services. Our main thrust is to alleviate poverty and isolation, so we’ve added programs that support the integration of new immigrants, expanded school projects and created new mental health programs.”

In line with its new orientation, CCS is focusing on questions of governance, through affiliation with Imagine Canada. “We’re streamlining our standards for financial accountability, management and volunteer policies,” Roche explains. “We hope to obtain their official certification next year.”

Navigating the network

AMI-Quebec wants to provide people dealing with mental illness an easier way to find services in the healthcare system. An upcoming series of videos will showcase experts in the field answering questions posed by the public. Called [Navigating the Healthcare System](#), the information package will be aired on YouTube.

“There’s a lot of frustration out there in getting the right answers,” says **Ella Amir**, executive director. “For years we’ve organized teleconferences and workshops on issues related to mental illness. But that format requires people to schedule their participation. Our YouTube videos will be available at any time.” AMI is asking for questions from the public by January. For information: 514 486 1448.

Spotlighting seniors

With one of the highest ageing rates in the world, Quebec is gradually becoming more conscious of the challenges facing its senior citizens. Some recent developments indicate concern is being translated into action, particularly in the case of elder abuse.

In October, the provincial government tabled a bill to combat maltreatment of seniors and other adults in vulnerable situations. (Financial, physical, and/or psychological abuse is widespread: over 60 Quebecers a day complain about elder abuse through local organizations or the government help line.)

Under the new law, whistleblowers would be protected against reprisals and granted immunity after making a report to local complaints commissioners. Every seniors’ home (public and private) in the province would be required to adopt and implement a policy to fight elder abuse.

In addition, a federal grant of \$700,000 is funding a pan-Canadian action research project on elder abuse. Led by the University of Sherbrooke Research Chair on Mistreatment of Older Adults, the project includes working with the Montreal police department and social service agencies to develop a model for standardizing police practice in dealing with adult abuse incidents. Police will be trained to handle all cases of elder abuse whether or not they are criminal in nature. The elder victims will then come under the care of the public and community health and social services network.

Under the theme “friend of the elderly”, Quebec is spending \$60 million this year on senior mobility and safety projects. Some \$5.5 million goes to community organizations to develop programs for improving seniors’ quality of life. Montreal got \$3.8 million to upgrade pedestrian crossings and improve access to trains and buses, to develop more seniors housing, and to support outreach programs to break seniors’ isolation and to secure their environment. The city also intends to improve communication with older citizens, particularly elderly immigrants, who make up nearly 40 percent of Montreal seniors.

Hearing in Nunavut

One of the first subjects to be addressed by the newly-created World Wide Hearing Foundation, headquartered in Montreal, is the problem of hearing among the Inuit of northern Quebec. The Foundation is sponsoring a project in which 24 Nunavut public health workers are being trained to identify ear and hearing problems such as infections, punctured eardrums and obstructions. Upon return to their communities, they will perform screenings and also train other healthcare workers. The resulting diagnoses will be linked to a database that will allow health professionals to determine the prevalence of ear problem rates in this region for the first time.

Stimulating social innovation

A group of eight foundations, universities and research institutions has founded a new social innovation centre in Montreal to stimulate the development of small businesses that will have a social impact and enhance quality of life for the less fortunate. Part of the plan is to create a talent pool working on resolution of socioeconomic problems.

It is estimated that over 60,000 Montrealers work in fields identified as being part of the social economy. Quebec has been a leader in providing financial tools to help collective enterprises. The new centre will provide a venue for the sharing of local, national and international expertise, be a social innovation incubator for new businesses and house a training and research laboratory.

Chinese community growing

Chinese Family Services of Greater Montreal (CFSGM), celebrating its 40th anniversary this year, has been named by the Peoples' Republic of China as official partner in overseeing the integration and well-being of its expatriate citizens. The Republic has made a small donation to that cause. There are over 5,000 Chinese immigrants to the city annually, 80 percent of whom have contacted the CFSGM.

In brief

Fr. **John Baxter** won the 2016 Bishop Crowley Award, for his outstanding commitment to youth ministry.

Pierre Cinq-Mars was named chair of the board of CCS.

Fr. **Raymond LaFontaine** has been named head of English Pastoral Services for the Archdiocese of Greater Montreal.

Neil Matheson has been named president of the MAB-Mackay-Constance Lethbridge Foundation.

Vaughan Roche was appointed Chief Operating Officer of CCS.

Michael Udy was named president of the board of Seniors Action Quebec.

Welcome Hall Mission is 125 years old.

Saint Columba House is 100 next year.

The J.W. McConnell Foundation is 90 next year.

The Volunteer Bureau of Montreal is 90 next year.

The Forum is 30 years old

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the *Red Feather Forum*. This quarterly newsletter on health and social services was introduced by the Red Feather Foundation in 1986 as a networking vehicle for the English-speaking community of Greater Montreal.

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

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