

A century for the School

When McGill's faculty of theology established a small department of social services in 1918, it created the core of what was to become an internationally acclaimed School of Social Work. Over its 100 years, the School has played a pivotal role in the development of social work practice and policy in Canada. Its thousands of graduates have carried the School's influence not only across Canada, but around the world.

"The School is especially known for its innovative approach to social services teaching and practice," explains **Nico Trocmé**, director. "Our engagement with the community around advocacy and research issues has been a vital extension of our academic program, and has created a special niche for us in the field of social work."

At the forefront of its outreach activities is the School's couple and family therapy program, the first in Quebec and the first in a Canadian social work school. There has been a domestic violence clinic on campus for several decades and, more recently, a gerontology clinic. "We want to see more use of our on-site clinics, and build them into the structure of the School," says Trocmé.

The School has pioneered programs for the training of social workers in assisting AIDS victims and their families, for addressing the situation of visible minorities, and refugees. Most recently the School played a seminal role in the federal government being court-ordered to provide social services to Indigenous children on reserves.

Trocmé is concerned about what has been happening in the field of social work. "The scope of social work has become increasingly diminished," he claims. "It's more and more being carried out by non-professionals. We're initiating a national study to ensure a more strategic role for the profession."

(Red Feather was very involved with the evolution of social work teaching in Montreal. Its 100 agencies served as training ground for new social workers for over 50 years.)

Helping the helpers to help

Adults over 65 years with mental health problems account for up to one-quarter of hospital emergency visits in Canada. Ten Canadians over 60 years commit suicide every week. These startling statistics illustrate the scope, and the toll, of mental illness among Canadian seniors. Early intervention could make a difference.

CCS (Collective Community Services) is offering a two-day course on Seniors Mental Health First Aid for caregivers and people who volunteer and work with seniors. Participants will be trained to recognize symptoms of mental health problems or crises as they develop and to respond effectively until the situation is resolved or appropriate treatment is found. The course will be given by a certified instructor from the Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC), which is funding the course. Attendees receive a Commission certificate.

Jillian Ritchie, CCS manager of Network and Community Health, is organizing the event. "We want to get the right people in the seats," Ritchie affirms. "For family members, and volunteers and staff from community organizations, the \$300 course might be beyond their budgets, but with MHCC funding, we can offer it for a nominal fee of \$25. And that includes lunches."

The course will be given over two Saturdays, February 10 and 17, from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. at CADRE, 7491 Cordner St., in LaSalle. To register: 514 937 5351, ext 245.

Internet access to 211

Centraide of Greater Montreal and the Referral Centre of Greater Montreal have just launched [Web 211 Grand Montreal](#), an online source of information on the social services available throughout the 82 municipalities of the metropolitan region. Telephone access to 211 will be installed throughout the whole region by April. It will be accessible from 8 a.m. to 6 p.m., seven days a week.

Focus on Montreal children

The Foundation of Greater Montreal launched its annual Vital Signs of Greater Montreal report in October. The focus this year is on the city's children and the issues which are impacting their lives. It is a thought-provoking document, designed to stimulate discussion and incite remedial and preventive action.

There are some 820,000 youngsters under the age of 18 in Greater Montreal. Information on their current status was gathered through the participation of 30 organizations and experts from all sectors of the community. In addition, groups of children from different city districts and living conditions were consulted to share their first-hand experience and reflections on the realities of their respective situations.

According to the report, hunger is one of the major issues affecting Montreal's children. Eleven percent of the city's households lack adequate food; close to 35,000 children under the age of 18 rely on food banks. In addition, 46 percent of Montreal high school students do not have breakfast before going to class. The rate of domestic violence experienced by Montreal children is higher than other metropolitan regions in Canada.

On the positive side, in addition to accessible daycare services, Montreal children benefit from an accessible and inclusive quality education. High school graduation rates are improving, and the number of dropouts dropping back in is rising.

Poverty is an ongoing problem – Montreal is home to the largest number of low-income districts in the country. However, the percentage of Montreal's young people living in a low income situation has declined from 22 percent to 16 percent. Over 90 percent reside less than one kilometre from a green space. For information: 514 866 0808.

UNICEF now ranks Canada 25th among 41 developed countries with respect to the well-being of children and young people. In 2007, this country ranked 12th.

Housing for West Island youth

In spite of its overall status as an affluent region, there are pockets of poverty on the West Island where many young people are living in social uncertainty. A lack of English-language services in general contributes to their marginalization, while homelessness exacerbates their problems. Action jeunesse de l'ouest-de-Île (AJOI) is an outreach organization that has been fundraising for an emergency shelter to provide temporary accommodation and in-place support systems for these vulnerable young people. AJOI has now teamed up with another local organization, Residences Bienvenues, to establish a parallel social housing project, called Ricochet.

"This partnership will have a doubly effective role," explains **Tania Charron**, AJOI executive director. "A 30-unit building will be half dedicated to social housing for youth struggling with homelessness; the other half will provide accommodation for young people coping with mental illness. They will share access to psychosocial services and community support."

News from NOVA

Two programs aimed at relieving the trauma of bereavement are being offered by NOVA in Greater Montreal, one for families of the agency's palliative care patients, the other for children experiencing grief from the death of someone close to them.

The Connie Moison Bereavement Program, named after an honoured past director, provides support group sessions for NOVA clients following the death of a loved one. (NOVA's free palliative care program consists of regular visits by a registered nurse and a 24/7 on-call nursing service.) For information: 514 866 6801.

Camp Carousel, organized by NOVA West Island, is a weekend of support and guidance in the country offered to youth ages six to 17. Registration deadline is May 1. Call 514 695 8335, ext. 210.

Mackay to move

Come next September, special needs students from the Mackay Centre and Philip E. Layton schools will be entering a brand new state-of-the-art facility in N.D.G. These venerable institutions have been sharing a building for several years in what has become very cramped quarters. Fortunately, \$22 million worth of funding from Quebec has enabled the Montreal English School Board to construct a new facility on land it already owned.

The Layton school, which dates back to 1900, specializes in education for the blind, while the 149-year old Mackay Centre caters to children with hearing and physical disabilities and communication disorders. Their current combined enrollment is 170.

One plus one

The YMCA in Westmount is running a special program to assist at-risk youth or those being followed by social services. Called the Plusone program, it entails pairing an adult mentor with a young person experiencing challenges. Youth aged ten to 17 are referred to the Y by community partners, such as teachers, social workers or police. Mentors are carefully selected to act as positive adult role models.

Meetings with mentors are generally held at the Y, which offers a wide range of recreational activities that the Plusone mentors and mentees can do together. For information: 514 931 8046.

New centre to simplify care

The MUHC is creating a “complex care centre” to coordinate treatment for patients with chronic and multiple illnesses. Instead of the often fragmented attention they now receive in multiple healthcare settings while being followed by several specialists, their care will be managed under a single medical department. The new centre will be the first of its kind in Quebec.

Addressing seniors’ isolation

The isolation of seniors in society is particularly pertinent within the English-speaking population of Quebec. The outmigration of family members from the province has led to many English-speaking seniors feeling isolated, and disconnected from society. A very interesting initiative is now under way to address this pervasive issue.

It began with the Father Dowd Foundation developing strategic planning for the organizations it supports. This exercise led to partnering with one of them, the English-speaking Catholic Council (ESCC), to sponsor a series of broadly-based workshops focusing specifically on the plight of isolated seniors.

The ESCC workshops have brought together a cross-section of people who work in the field of eldercare – caregivers, community leaders and pastoral visitors – to brainstorm on chief issues involving senior isolation. They are discussing the need for sharing information, best practices, outreach opportunities, attracting volunteers and providing effective training for them.

“There’s a lot of activity now on this issue,” explains **Andy Malolepzy**, Father Dowd Foundation secretary. “All the community organizations are doing something in a variety of ways with varying resources and different outreach activities. The aim now is to pool our expertise and research and draw up a comprehensive plan of action for the benefit of all. We’re not trying to build a new organization; we want to use the best resources available to help everybody.”

The movement has blossomed to the point where Catholic Action, a recently formed agency founded to involve Catholics in volunteer activities, is set to coordinate a central website on behalf of all the senior centres. It will be an information resource and central suppository for available services. Although an initiative of Catholic community organizations, this project is non-denominational in scope. For information: amalolep@gmail.com.

Head and Hands moves

N.D.G.'s youth community centre, Head and Hands, has found a new home. It has moved into a 10-year-rent-free space in the former Benny Library. The move brings the centre closer to its most vulnerable clientele and provides greater space for its activities.

Nearly 50 years in operation, Head and Hands helps more than 4000 young people a year. It offers a range of services, including a medical clinic, legal counselling, mental health services, a food pantry, sex education and guidance for safer drug use.

Info for fathers

A Canada-wide study led by Montreal's MUHC Research Institute has led to creation of a website dedicated to new fathers and their wellbeing. Participants were questioned on men's needs related to the psychosocial aspects of transition into parenthood, lifestyle behaviours and parenting. Results indicated that men are seeking a broad range of web-based information, including parenting/infant care, supporting and improving relationships with their partners, work-family balance, managing stress, and improving sleep. The new dad information is available at HealthyDads.ca.

Anglos outdo francos

A recent study by the Institute de la statistique du Québec (based on analysis of 2012 Statistics Canada data) concludes that 47 percent of Quebecers who speak English at home had done volunteer work in the previous year compared with the 32 percent of those speaking French at home who had done so. Overall, 36 percent of Quebecers said they had done volunteer work, compared with 49 percent of Canadians who had.

Volunteering in Quebec was most common among women, parents with school-age children and people with at least one parent born outside Canada.

In brief

Christine Boyle has been appointed project manager of the Community Innovation Fund directed by the Quebec Community Groups Network.

Tania Charron is new executive director of Action jeunesse de l'ouest-de-l'Île.

Rosemary O'Grady has been named executive director of NOVA Montréal.

Jillian Ritchie has been appointed manager of Network and Community Health at CCS.

The MUHC Foundation and Royal Victoria Hospital Foundation have amalgamated, and now share a common website.

AMI-Quebec is offering new yoga workshops for caregivers. Attendance is free, but registration is necessary for each session. Call 514 486 1448.

AMI-Quebec is offering a teleworkshop on Types of Mental Illness on February 27. For information and registration: amiquebec.org/teleworkshops.

The Volunteer Board of Montreal is offering a workshop (in French) on accessing and integrating women from ethno-cultural minorities onto community organization boards. For information: 514 842 3351.

Dawson Community Centre celebrates 100 years of social service this year.

The Red Feather Forum will in future be appearing quarterly in January, April, July and October.

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

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309.

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