

Dispensary turns 140

Founded by the YWCA in 1879 as a Meals-on-Wheels program, the Montreal Diet Dispensary (MDD) is known nationally and internationally for its pioneering work to reduce the incidence of low birth-weight babies. While prenatal nutrition is still its core activity, the MDD has broadened its scope by partnering with other community organizations to ensure nutritional security for new generations of marginalized women.

It was during the '50s that then MDD director Agnes Higgins introduced what became known as the Higgins Method of providing pre- and post-natal nutrition counselling and proper nutritional supplements to needy mothers. The Method became widely adopted, and was the inspiration for the provincial program for CLSC dietitians set up in 1991. (It is called OLO, for oeufs, lait, oranges).

"We used to handle all their training," says **Jackie Demers**, MDD executive director. "Now our program is online and can be accessed not only by dietitians but also by anyone working with pregnant women. We still see around 2,000 pregnant women a year at our facility, but with so many changes happening in our community profile, we're more and more involved in outreach activities.

"New immigrants are a natural target for our program of ensuring low-cost nutritious food," says Demers. "It's especially true for non-status refugees with no access to the public health system. We will also be making more effort to reach out to people with substance abuse problems. And we've started organizing group activities in some women's shelters. We're already seeing the benefits of having a community nutritionist on hand to help them."

The MDD has a long history of dedicated leaders. There have been only five directors during its 140 years of operation. "So much good work has been done over time by those outstanding women who have directed the Dispensary," affirms Demers. "What's most important for me is to carry on that tradition and dedication."

REISA spreading its wings

Well established in Montreal's east end as the organization representing its English-speaking population, REISA has recently broadened both its base and its mandate. As well as serving Montreal North and Ahuntsic, it now covers the territories of Saint-Léonard and Hochelga-Maisonneuve.

"That means our prospective clientele has risen from 75,000 to 160,000," says **Fatiha Gatra Guimiri**, executive director. "To cope with this increased responsibility we've added to headquarters staff and set up a satellite office in Ahuntsic. So now we have two divisions, REISA est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal and REISA nord-de-Île-de-Montréal."

REISA will also be operating beyond its traditional health issues. "We're going for two more vulnerable groups: youth and immigrants," explains Gatra-Guimiri. "The big feature of our new territory is its diversity and we've been meeting with organizations working with English-speaking immigrants so we can work with them on access to health and social services.

"We're also creating a youth network where we could integrate with French institutions that have services they could offer to English-speaking young people. Many of their employees are young and bilingual but anglophone students don't know that because they've never been approached. Our objective is to work with them to adapt existing services so that English-speaking youth can integrate into the social system."

CROP surveying anglos

The Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) has launched its third province-wide CROP survey of English-speaking Quebecers to develop a better understanding of their experience and opinions on accessing health and social services in English. Over 3,000 people will be queried on their perceptions of available services and what they see as priorities for the future.

CCS gets certification

Three years ago the board of CCS decided to strengthen that agency's performance and status by applying for certification from IMAGINE Canada, the national organization set up 30 years ago to promote the non-profit sector in this country. In April, CCS joined 200 other Canadian non-profits that have obtained IMAGINE's administrative blessing, an achievement well-earned.

It was a very rigorous undertaking. "Not for the faint of heart", says **Vaughan Roche**, CCS chief operating officer. "There are 73 standards that must be adhered to. And they apply in five areas: board governance, financial accountability, fundraising, staff management, and volunteer involvement. Not only must you meet IMAGINE's standards, you need to demonstrate that they're being applied, and you have to re-qualify every five years.

"It took us three years to complete the work because we're a small organization," says Roche. "The new setup will streamline our operations, but will also add another layer of work to everything we do. As well as broader principles to follow, there are many small things to manage that have to be reviewed annually. It's the choreography of it all that ends up making it a success. For someone of our size to get this certification is quite an achievement. The onus on us is to keep it up."

There are significant benefits to be had from having gone through the procedure. "Our major donors are very cognizant of the value of this certification," says Roche. "And the organizations we deal with will have a greater degree of trust in us; it's an impartial evaluation that acknowledges that we're as good as we say we are. Also, as our board members change, it will remain as a living document of continuity in our organization."

Roche is keen on seeing other local organizations go for certification status. "If other non-profits are interested in sharpening up their governance and controls, we'd be happy to consult with them." For information: 514 937 5351, ext. 235.

Montrealers more generous

Montrealers have been showing increasing generosity to two of the city's major charitable fundraising institutions.

Centraide

It is an exceptional year for Centraide of Greater Montreal. With an important increase in donations during its last fundraising campaign, the charitable agency has this year been able to significantly raise its investments in the community. A total of \$51.7 million – \$1.3 million more than last year – has been allocated to its 350 affiliated agencies to fight poverty and social exclusion.

Centraide's ultimate goal is to improve the living conditions of highly vulnerable people in Montreal, Laval and the South Shore. Accessibility to housing, the development of young children, support for parents and families, food security, and the inclusion of seniors, people with disabilities, and immigrants are among its activities being supported through Montrealers' generosity.

FGM

It was a record year also for the Foundation of Greater Montreal (FGM), its pooled assets topping \$308 million, thanks to donor investments of \$40.6 million. As a result, the FGM was able to provide over \$8.5 million in subsidies to 467 non-profit community organizations.

The FGM was founded* 20 years ago to administer funds from donors who want to contribute to the betterment of the community. Donors can set up personal, family or corporate foundations within the FGM to benefit their designated causes, or contribute to allocations made by the FGM to support community organizations.

*Red Feather was a founding member of Centraide of Greater Montreal in 1974, and turned over its assets to Centraide's Foundation in 2002. It was also one of the founding members of the FGM, creating a \$500,000 endowment fund within the community foundation.

New life for old shelter

Benedict Labre House, a long-established refuge for the homeless, has gone through several transformations since it was founded in Griffintown in 1952 by a group of Catholic laymen dedicated to serving the poor. It first served as a dwelling for a dozen older men that had met in the streets. But in response to a greater and growing need, a formal shelter was organized. During the '80s, de-institutionalization and the economic recession led to such an increase in homelessness problems that the House became a day centre, meeting a key need in southwest Montreal.

“We’re a big operation today,” says **Francine Nadler**, clinical coordinator. “Our clients, mostly men, come from all over Montreal: last year there were over 18,000 visits for the services and programs we provide, and we served 65,000 meals. We have 13 professionals on staff and boast up to 500 volunteers.”

Services available are many and varied. They range from food and clothing to hygiene necessities like showers and laundry service. There is crisis intervention, referrals, and accompaniment. Social and educational activities include art classes and gardening and a computer literacy program. A pre-employment program has recently been introduced.

A new administration in place since 2016 has brought about significant changes to operation of the House. “But the biggest changes are yet to come,” says Nadler. “We’re going to build a new facility in the Atwater area that will have our day centre on the ground floor and social housing on upper floors. It’s scheduled to open in two years.”

Also in the Atwater area, Benedict Labre is now working with the Native Women’s Shelter and Nazareth House to find a rapid solution to the issues involving Indigenous Montrealers who recently lost their local drop-in shelter at Cabot Square. “We’ll be opening a facility for them near there in the next month or two,” Nadler affirms. “It’s all part of our plans for change, and it’s all positive.”

Talking to seniors

The Minister responsible for seniors, **Marguerite Blais**, has allotted \$400,000 to a pilot program designed to alleviate isolation among the senior population of three districts in Montreal. Based on opening up new avenues of communication between seniors and their community, the program will involve sensitizing employees of local businesses on how to interact with elderly customers who appear vulnerable or in need of assistance. They will be briefed on resources available in the health and social services system and whom to call to help the seniors when required.

The program covers the Faubourg, Plateau Mont-Royal and Saint-Louis-Parc neighbourhoods, where 55 per cent of the population over 65 years lives alone, 43 percent of whom are on low income. If successful, the two-year project will form the basis for a province-wide program of “neighbourliness”.

Palliative care centre to open

The long-awaited St. Raphael Palliative Care Home and Day Centre, the first such facility on Montreal Island, is set to open in Outremont in September. Volunteers have been working for 10 years to develop plans and fundraise the necessary \$10 million to get it up and running.

St. Raphael was originally a Roman Catholic church, built in the 1930s, that had closed and remained empty for nine years. The building has now been transformed into a 12-bed palliative care residence and a day centre providing free care and services to terminally ill people still living at home. There is space for up to 20 ailing visitors a day who can access a range of programs that include personal care, physiotherapy, therapeutic and recreational activities, providing important respite for caregivers.

Two years ago St. Raphael began hiring professional staff experienced in cancer issues. It is expected to need at least 400 volunteers. For information: 514 736 2081.

Goldbloom awards due

The Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) is calling for nominations for their 10th annual Sheila and Victor Goldbloom Community Service Awards. The awards honour individuals who have made an outstanding contribution to the vitality and understanding of English-speaking Quebec. Who have contributed to strengthening the English-speaking community and building bridges between Quebecers of different backgrounds. Who have demonstrated signal leadership and commitment as a volunteer or as a professional. Nominations close on August 31. For information: info@qcg.com.

Help line #211 a hit

Montreal's social services information number 211, sponsored by the Information and Referral Centre of Greater Montreal and Centraide of Greater Montreal, racked up significant statistics during its first year of operation. There were some 444,000 visits to the website (www.211qc.ca) and nearly 27,000 calls to the phone line operated by a team of counsellors able to direct callers to available socio-community resources in the metropolitan region.

The 211 phone line is open seven days a week between 8 a.m. and 6 p.m., providing response in 200 possible languages. The website lists 600 social and community resources available in the Greater Montreal area. The service has provided information in such areas as food assistance needs, job searches, support for seniors and mental health issues.

Studying food security

The Foundation of Greater Montreal (FGM) is proceeding into its second year of Faim zéro, a project aiming at assisting the 11 per cent of Montrealers who are living without food security. The FGM has collected basic data on the issue and will begin developing strategies for financing and effective action to alleviate the problem.

In brief

The new Montreal regional access committee has just been named. The committee will work with local healthcare institutions in developing regional access plans for services in English. Members are: **David Cassidy, Dalys Fine-Riley, Fatiha Gatre-Guemiri, Sabrina Nesha Jafralie, Marilyne Kaplow, Eric Maldoff, Howard Nadler, Manuela Piovesan, Germain Tullio, Claire Webster, and Daniel Marc Weinstock.**

Jean-François de Grandpré has been re-elected president of the Foundation of Greater Montreal.

Leslie Hill has been appointed to the Commission spéciale sur les droits des enfants et la protection de la jeunesse.

Debbie Horricks was elected president of Seniors Action Quebec.

Josée Parent has been awarded the Ella Amir Award for Innovations in Mental Health by Ami-Quebec.

Donna Sharpe is the new president of Ami-Quebec.

The Depot Community Food Centre in N.D.G. was awarded the "Coup de coeur" award from the Quebec government for its healthy food policy.

NOVA West Island is holding its Camp Carousel, a weekend in the country for children aged six to 17 years suffering bereavement, on September 28/29. For information: 514 698 8335, ext. 210.

Auberge Madeleine is 45 years old this year.

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<http://redfeathermontreal.ca>.

The editor welcomes story ideas: 514 937 4309.

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