

Access plans finally in view

It has been five years since access plans for providing health and social services in English were last reviewed, but wheels are now in motion for an important upgrade, so vital to the wellbeing of the province's English-speakers. First on the agenda was formation of a new provincial access committee.

"It's unfortunate that it took such a long time to approve the decree that created the committee," says **Sara Saber-Freedman**, vice-chair. "But it was done in December, and now the Integrated University Health and Social Services Centres (CIUSSSs) can get on with creating regional committees and completing new access plans for their institutions.

"The object of this exercise is that we want access plans that provide for a comparable range of services in English to those available in French," affirms Saber-Freedman. "To get that we need top-notch people to serve on regional committees who know their own communities, how the health system works and have the motivation to undertake this important job. That procedure is about to begin."

Effectiveness to be monitored

The regional healthcare centres have already begun a review of existing access plans. To achieve consistency in approach, they are following new guidelines developed by the Ministry in collaboration with the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN).

"It's a huge undertaking," affirms **Ghyslaine Prata**, CHSSN consultant. "They have to analyze every service and get approval for every proposed change or addition. Then the plans have to go to regional committees and the provincial committee before final Ministry approval."

In another new development, the Ministry has decided to measure outcomes of the new access programs. Prata is working to support the Ministry in developing guidelines for those evaluation efforts.

"This has never been done before," says Prata. "It's such a very important step forward. It's gratifying that the Ministry has been so very open and supportive. It's moving ahead very well."

Community input a first

As the five healthcare centres serving English-speaking Montrealers finalize their new access plans, they will have a wealth of client information to draw upon. Three key community organizations are each consulting their client base to determine just where and how the lack of accessibility to services in English needs to be addressed.

The East End Network for English-language Services (REISA), Collective Community Services (CCS) and the African Canadian Development and Prevention Network together have consulted 12 focus groups across the Island to prepare a portrait of the situation that now exists. For example, REISA has consulted homeless people with addictions, parents with disabled children, active seniors and seniors who are shut-ins.

"It's a very interesting way to document what is really happening in the system," explains **Janet Forsyth**, REISA consultant. "These focus groups have provided participants with a confidential space where they can speak frankly among friends about what the language barriers are and how they affect people. In our report they will remain anonymous, but they will be heard. I think it will surprise some people in the healthcare system the extent to which language barriers are impacting our community.

"We've needed this kind of document for so long," affirms Forsyth. "The key here is the confidence that has been built between our community organizations and their public partners. They are letting us tell them what their services delivery problems are. And we hope they will base future policies on what they're hearing from the grass roots."

This initiative was funded through the Community Health and Social Services Network.

Big plans for Ste. Anne's

The venerable institution that won international accolades for its care of war veterans now serves a mixed clientele that includes elderly civilians from the West Island. With this new mandate has come a range of new services and programs that reach a larger segment of the population. And plans are under way to broaden its scope even further.

"Major plans are being developed for Ste. Anne's," says **Patrick Murphy-Lavallée**, director of the Elderly Autonomy Program for the CIUSSS West Island. "The hospital has long been recognized as a centre of excellence in geriatric care. We're going to make it even better."

There have been some significant developments at the hospital in the past couple of years: an outpatient geriatric clinic has opened; 33 rehabilitation beds are now available; and facilities have been modified to re-unite elderly couples who both need long-term care.

Last Fall, the hospital and local school commission opened a school for orderlies onsite. Graduates have the option of working at Ste. Anne's or other institutions under the West Island CIUSSS.

"There are 1,500 long-term care beds within our jurisdiction," says Lavallée, "so the need is there. Of course seniors would like to stay at home as long as possible. So we have spent over \$3 million in the past two years on home care. We now see that the length of stays in our long-term care has halved.

"There is a lot more we'd like to do," says Lavallée. "We're exploring the idea of building a "maison des aînés", a residence-like facility that would accommodate a small number of people. We want to introduce palliative care beds, a day centre for seniors in the community, more specialized clinics, more teaching and more research. It's all very exciting. That's why I love my job."

Ste. Anne's has a total of 446 beds, 130 of them held by veterans, whose average age is 95.

Caring about young carers

AMI-Quebec is holding a day-long symposium on young care-givers on March 22. The gathering is to provide a forum for people in the education and social sectors to address an issue that is becoming increasingly problematic.

"There is a huge group of young people out there who are providing informal, unpaid care to family members who are ill or disabled," says **Ella Amir**, executive director. "There can be important negative outcomes of prolonged caregiving on young people, but there is very little attention being paid to them and no dedicated policies acknowledging their work or the stress they might be experiencing. They're completely off the radar.

"There are some very progressive programs elsewhere," says Amir," but this is the first time in Quebec for such an initiative. I've been exploring this issue for some time and hope the symposium stimulates awareness and recognition of the needs of our young carers." For information: 514 486 1448.

Training benefits teens

Some Pointe St. Charles teens being trained to work at the Saint Columba House summer camp for kids are also broadening their personal development and experience. From February to May, eight youth 14 to 16-years old are being coached in such skills as behaviour management, positive reinforcement and team building. They will also volunteer in local activities to develop awareness of their community.

"These are mostly disadvantaged kids," says **Akki Mackay**, Teens Program coordinator. "So our program not only gives them their first work experience, it's also their first time acting as role models. Past participants say it has had a very positive influence on their lives: developing a new self-confidence, learning their own capabilities, making new friendships, improving their academic achievement. Most of all, it's changed their outlook on the future. For information: 514 932 6202.

New help in mental health

Doors are opening for young anglophone Montrealers with mental illness. As part of a national mental health research and evaluation program targeting 12- to 25-year-olds, new service centres are opening up here to help this very vulnerable population.

“The whole purpose is to transform mental health services for youth,” explains **Nelson Pimantel**, coordinator, Youth in Difficulty services, with the West Island CIUSSS. “Until now, it has been so very difficult for them to get services and even then they were often ineffective.”

Basic to the program are drop-in centres called Youth Hubs, “chill spaces” that youth with mental health problems can visit to be quietly alone or interact with others having similar problems. A youth liaison worker is on site to work with them on issues like self-esteem or socialization skills. They receive preliminary screening and referral to a professional. The aim is have an evaluation within 72 hours and a therapist appointment within 30 days.

“A key feature of this new service is that it includes youth 17 to 25,” says Pimantel. “Before, they were considered adult at 18, and were dropped from the system. So this is actually forcing us to re-invent our services offer. It’s quite a remarkable transformation.” Hubs are now located at three CLSCs: Dorval-Lachine, Park Extension and Métro.

Foundation to study kids

The Foundation of Greater Montreal will finance a major six-year study of Montreal children. Led by l’Université de Montréal and Concordia University researchers, it is a longitudinal study designed to better understand how children relate to their life milieu over time. It will follow 150 children from grade six to 17 years from different neighbourhoods for six years. It will focus on their daily life, their hopes and their sense of belonging and their transitions over time as they grow into adolescence.

Senior centre 40 years young

The New Hope Centre in N.D.G. started in 1979 with a small group of seniors meeting weekly for coffee at a local Presbyterian church. Today located at the Kensington Presbyterian Church, it is a vital community asset linking over 400 seniors in a wide range of activities and communal services. And it is broadening its clientele base to serve an even larger community.

“Our main reason for being here is to break the isolation of seniors within the English-speaking community,” affirms **Gerry Lafferty**, executive director. “So many have had families move away and now they’re very much alone. We assist and encourage them to remain active members of the community. We welcome them for a host of activities and programs and reach out to those who can’t come here on their own.”

One of the core services that New Hope offers is its Meals-on-Wheels program, the largest in western Montreal. Last year volunteers delivered over 15,500 meals to home-bound seniors in N.D.G. And it’s getting bigger: the Centre is expanding its program into a satellite Meals-on-Wheels in Côte-St.-Luc.

Lafferty points with pride to the Centre’s transportation services. “Lack of transportation is a key factor contributing to seniors’ isolation,” he affirms. “We provide free transportation to and from the Centre for seniors unable to get here on their own. For 20 years we rented a bus for ‘group groceries’ to take NDG seniors to the local Provigo, where volunteers help them shop and the store deliveries their groceries for free. Four years ago the Father Dowd Foundation bought us our own mini-bus, and because we have legal clearance, we can now have six volunteer drivers, so we’re offering it to other seniors centres in the Greater Montreal area to use for their clientele. They only have to pay for the gas.”

A recent addition, New Hope is now providing weekly space for a group of gay seniors, Gay and Grey, to socialize and support each other.

Keeping Black kids here

The enthusiasm might be there, but the opportunities are limited. A recent survey of young English-speaking Blacks showed they very much wanted to remain and build careers in Montreal, but there are many obstacles to overcome. In response to this dilemma, the Black Community Resources Centre (BCRC) has created a project called Stop the Brain Drain to help Black youth to become more employable and to assist them to find employment.

Part of this development strategy is putting in place programs that ensure that young Blacks at least graduate from high school and have a college or technical certificate. In addition, several Black community organizations are working together to improve the employability of Black youth through mentorship programs. They will help them find employment and will assist employers as they move to diversify their workforce.

Bright beginnings

A new supportive program for English-speaking children 0 to five-years old and their families is being introduced by the community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) across Quebec. A significant number of these children come from socioeconomically-vulnerable family environments and so face severe challenges to their social and educational development.

The program, called Bright Beginnings, is designed to address the risk factors associated with their situation. The emphasis will be on early learning, communication skills and social and emotional development.

The program entails collaboration between the English-speaking community, government and service providers, linguistic adaptation of existing services and outreach to the children and their families. It is sponsored through the Lucie and André Chagnon Foundation, which has provided 5-year funding of \$3.8 million.

In brief

Members of the English-speaking community who have been appointed to boards of the Integrated University Health and Social Services Centres in Greater Montreal:

Marlene Jennings CIUSSS du Centre-Sud-de-l'Île-de-Montréal
Michael Udy

Alan Maislin CIUSSS du Centre-Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Joanne Beaudoin CIUSSS de l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal
Judy Martin

Ghislaine Prata: CIUSSS de l'Est-de-l'Île-de-Montréal

Josephine Primiani: CIUSSS de Nord-de-l'Île-de-Montréal.

Nadia Hachimi-Idrissi was appointed assistant president-director general of the CIUSSS de l'Ouest-de-l'Île-de-Montréal.

Vanessa Herrick has been appointed executive director of Seniors Action Quebec.

Richard McConomy was elected president of the Queen Elizabeth Health Complex board.

Mélanie Walsh has been named executive director of Auberge Madeleine.

The Children's Hospital is 115 this year.

Nazareth House is celebrating its 60th anniversary.

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