



News en Ville

Fall 2012

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A newsletter published for and by the residents,
staff, volunteers and supporters of L'Abri en Ville.
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L'Abri wins national mental health award

Cecily Lawson
Audrey Bean

L'Abri en Ville was delighted to be honored by the Mental Health Commission of Canada with an award presented at a ceremony in Ottawa on October 16th. L'Abri took top place in the Community Capacity category, one of five areas recognized by the MHCC on the occasion of its fifth anniversary. This category comprises initiatives that strengthen the capacity of community-based mental health services to meet community needs, and to foster recovery and well-being for people with a mental illness and their support networks.



David and Eleanor with Dr. David Goldbloom and Louise Bradley

L'Abri's application explained that "the initiative of L'Abri en Ville is to widen the narrow circle consisting of family members, professionals, and others with mental illness by creating an authentic community of around 100 people: 30 residents and 70 volunteers. The volunteers, whose purpose is to connect to the well side of the residents, open up other essential dimensions of recovery through their friendship and involvement." We also expanded the definition of the application

to include the three groups that have adopted the model with our help – Les toits d'Émile in Châteauguay, Our Harbour in Saint Lambert, and Ancoura in Ottawa.

Eleanor Beattie and resident David Seymour accepted the award on behalf of L'Abri and the network. Afterwards, Eleanor recalled the founding of L'Abri en Ville 21 years ago: "When I heard about this model, it was the first time I realized that we as ordinary people could do something to create community for people with a

mental illness." David added, "These awards are a public mark of compassion and an important step in the evolution of the effort to eliminate stigma."

A total of 13 network members participated in the event, displaying our materials and making valuable contacts. What an honour and pleasure it was to represent all the members of the four communities, and the many organizations and individuals who share our commitment and have supported us over the years.

President's Message

Campbell Stuart

This year has seen some big changes at L'Abri. After 18 years with us, Marianne Metrakos retired at the end of April. Marlo Turner-Ritchie has stepped into her shoes as Lead Coordinator, and is bringing her own unique style and boundless energy to the job. I greatly appreciate the support board and staff are providing during this transition.

I say big changes, but of course one thing will never change – L'Abri's commitment to maintaining an authentic and caring community for everyone - residents, volunteers and staff alike. In all my experience with community organizations over the years, I have never seen anything approaching L'Abri's depth of understanding and seamless implementation of this philosophy. In truth, "On est tous dans le même bateau."

L'Abri has much to tell the world and we were recently given a priceless opportunity to deliver

our message. As described elsewhere in this Newsletter, L'Abri was awarded Mental Health Commission of Canada's 5th Anniversary National Mental Health Award. As part of this, the MHCC has produced and is distributing a video and case study on L'Abri, which we can also use to disseminate our philosophy. This honour is no overnight success. Years of commitment and hard work by many people have brought us to this. Congratulations to us all, and especially to the Collaborative Dissemination Committee!

L'Abri is working on longer-term issues as well. Our individual donor base is aging and many people have been affected by the economic downturn. While L'Abri remains financially healthy, we are examining new sources and approaches for fundraising.

The fact is that our whole community is aging, so we are looking into long-term strategies



Campbell and Pierre

to deal with this phenomenon, including what services our residents need and how best to deliver them, and how we might recruit younger volunteers.

All this, while we have kept up our busy schedule of activities such as camp, outings to museums and zoos, Montreal Walks for Mental Health and - my personal favorite - dinner and conversation with good friends.

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Our model might help promote integration abroad

Cecily Lawson

Managing mental illness is hard enough in a rich country like Canada. It is all the more challenging in developing countries. Ask MUHC psychiatrist Dr Marc Laporta whose interest in international work has taken him to Vietnam and Indonesia and whose focus currently is on the organization of services for people with mental illness in Central America, the Caribbean and South America.

“When you’re working in middle and low income countries, health care budgets are small, and often within health care the amount allotted to mental health is less than one percent,” says Dr Laporta who is director of the Montreal World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Research and Training in Mental Health at the Douglas Mental Health University Institute. “So what happens is that you end up having services mainly for people who are in acute phases, who need hospitalization. The community gets very frightened by this so there is pressure to have patients stay within an institutional setting rather than integrating people back into the community. It’s a self-perpetuating cycle.”

Breaking that cycle is key and Dr. Laporta believes that the L’Abri model can offer guidance on how to do this. As a longtime supporter of L’Abri and a member of its Advisory Board, he knows the organization well and admires the way it functions. “L’Abri has found a way of working that does



Dr. Marc Laporta

not raise red flags in the communities where the apartments are located. People don’t say ‘This shouldn’t happen in our community’,” he notes. “And it feeds back into people’s attitudes; their fears and their preconceived notions dissolve over time because they are living side by side in the community with persons who have a mental illness and nothing is happening that’s dangerous or scary.”

In the world of health care we talk about the social determinants of health. “I think that L’Abri has a way of taking people and putting the chances on their side by improving their social determinants,” says Marc Laporta. “You provide someone with a roof, with a place to stay, there are other people around to talk to, there is support in budgeting so that they can buy adequate food, there are some outings so that your basic needs are provided for and you’re not sitting around and slipping into more risky ways of entertaining yourself. You’re breaking the vicious circle of negative determinants that makes things worse.”

Transferring models developed in higher-income countries to poorer countries can sometimes be very useful despite the wide gaps in available resources. Currently Dr Laporta is collaborating with the WHO in the Caribbean on a project which is inspired by the Quebec model of integrating mental health services into primary care. Teaming up with McGill’s Department of Family Medicine, they are working with primary care providers in six Caribbean countries setting up a training program to enable them to recognize and manage people with mental health problems.

Dr Laporta is optimistic about the increasing understanding of mental illness in many countries. “It’s surprisingly difficult for people to come to understand that someone’s behaviour might be a symptom of illness and not intentional. It takes knowledge, it takes understanding, it takes empathy. But it’s slowly happening in the world now.” Just one sign of that is a new project that Laporta and Quebec colleagues are about to embark upon in the Central American country of Belize. An association of families and users has asked them for help empowering their community and giving them the tools to help people with mental illness. It’s just starting, he notes, but perhaps at some point in the not too distant future L’Abri en Ville could provide a model for that community – and others in the developing world.

by Jerome Kierans

Where Love levels all ranks
the bubble remains in the centre of the
liquid

The foundation of L'Abri en Ville
and our roofs above
are plumb with the floors
with justly proportionate
and level judgement.

Constructed by our founders
and the builders over the years
by each and every one of us
who decided to stay
and build our community.

Exactly True.



Camp Weredale



Walk for Mental Health



Just wondering

Susan Purcell

Why do some people with mental illness find it hard to get up and exercise? Maybe they just need to accept that as part of the illness--What do you think?

Nike says “Just do it”-- but it’s easier said than done when you’re living with a mental illness (MI). Often people with schizophrenia or depression face a major hurdle finding the motivation to get their bodies moving. As a result, their physical health is often poor, with higher than average rates of obesity and Type 2 diabetes.

In fact, studies show people with severe mental illness die 10 to 15 years earlier than the general population. Faced with this sobering information, we can see how important exercise is for people with mental illness.

L’Abri residents generally do better than people who don’t live in such a supportive environment. Regular contact with roommates and volunteers contributes to a fuller life. Joining in outdoor activities, being visited and invited out, working on projects or playing games-- all help counteract those sluggish feelings. Several residents walk distances, some ride bikes, some swim. But for others, exercising remains an elusive goal.

Worsening the problem is the fact that some people with schizophrenia and other MIs make poor dietary choices-- consuming too much fat and not

enough fiber. Anti-psychotic medications may also contribute to weight gain. Carrying extra weight makes it even harder to get out there and put your body to work.. But an improved diet can have amazing results. Buying fresh fruits and vegetables, watching portions and avoiding fast food and junk food helps shed pounds and increase energy.

With bipolar disorder too much exercise can be a problem. Those who tend to cycle upwards may need to limit their exercise, to avoid overstimulation. But moderate regular exercise can help steady their mood and alleviate depression, by releasing

brain chemicals called endorphins that cause euphoric feelings and can help normalize sleep patterns.

One tip I can pass on to would-be exercisers after years going to the YMCA-- choose a definite time to do it, rather than waiting until the mood hits. Figure out if you’re a morning person or the opposite type, pick your days and stick to it. This applies whether you plan to walk, bike or attend classes at a place like the Y, where there’s plenty of choices on the schedule. And I can promise-- you’ll feel so much better after!



Chris gets ready to ride at Lafayette

Residents feel good about paying it forward

Susan Purcell

Our residents are happy to have found a home in the welcoming family that is L'Abri en Ville. Many show their appreciation in the best possible way— by giving back. In offering their time to non-profit groups, they complete the circle of caring-- helping less fortunate Montrealers just as they have been helped.

One of our newer residents, Marième, has been volunteering for five years at Femmes du Monde, a group that provides women with information on housing and health. Marième helps by preparing letters for mailing, washing dishes and cleaning—but she also joins her colleagues to fight for change. Recently she marched in a demonstration opposing government attempts to limit women's right to abortion. "I meet women from all different countries", she told me. "I believe in women's rights."

Her roommate in the Brasilia apartment, Florence, just started work as a secretarial assistant at Forward House, a west-end organization in the mental health domain. She answers the phone, and



Florence, left, receives training from Forward House worker Portia

types up schedules and phone lists. "It keeps me busy. It's a lively place," she says. "If I didn't do this, I'd be sitting at home."

Another busy pair of roommates are Bronko and Pierre at the Wellington apartment. They're real pioneers at Amitié-Friendship, a housing project downtown, also for people living with mental illness. Bronko started out 14 years ago "mopping floors". Nowadays he prepares coffee for drop-in clients, does dishes, cleans tables, and takes out the garbage. "I like people. Sometimes I sit down and have a coffee. It keeps my mind occupied— I stay out of trouble." And best of all: "They tell me I do a good job." Pierre is a ten-year veteran, using his car to deliver letters to hospitals, pick up donations of books or food, and make bank

deposits. He feels good knowing he's contributing to the smooth running of the organization.

These are just a few of the many residents who help out in the community. Whether they give time to a food depot, a church, a hospital or some other group, we're proud of them for "paying it forward."

The newsletter is also available by email. Please contact info@labrienville.org to receive future editions in your inbox.

Upcoming Events

Citrus fundraiser pickup: Dec 3 (Monday), Dec. 4 (Tuesday) from 2-8 p.m.
Holiday Party: Monday Dec. 10

Coordinators' Corner

Marlo Turner-Ritchie, Beverley Kerr, Loraine Jacmain

We've had a busy spring and summer, that started with our saying farewell to our former Coordinator, Marianne Metrakos. We wish her well in her retirement and thank her for her years of tremendous dedication and contribution to L'Abri. We welcome as Lead Coordinator Marlo Turner-Ritchie, formerly Executive Director at Head & Hands / A deux mains, and a long-time NDG resident.

Special care and time was invested in residents who have moved on from L'Abri, and those who have joined us. We wish the best to Harvey, Noah and Christiane, and welcome Amina at Hélène and Wanda at Lafayette. As a result, we have initiated a major apartment cleaning and painting at Americana, and have been grateful for donated furniture.

Since the spring, we have had an outing to a sugar shack, the AGM, Games Night and afternoons, card design, picnics in the park, shooting film for the award, camp, Granby Zoo, lunch outings to Au Pois Chic and countless outings with volunteers, including to their own summer cottages and homes.

As we prepare for a very busy fall, we welcome our new student intern, Lauren Watson, enthusiastically representing the McGill School of Social Work as a year two student.

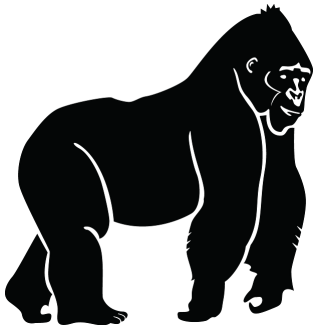


Beverley, Marlo and Loraine at a park picnic

Wish List

- Handy person
- Lamps
- Wordpress/IT helpers
- Alternative health practitioners
- Apartment Volunteers

Qui regarde qui au zoo de Granby?



Qu'est-ce qui se passe quand les humains regardent les animaux? Selon Pierre, qui a récemment visité le Zoo de Granby avec une dizaine de résidents de

L'Abri, "On a eu du fun."

Ce qui est clair, c'est que Pierre regardait très attentivement les bêtes.

"Les tigres étaient couchés, ils nous tournaient le dos."

Mais peu à peu ces créatures magnifiques "nous montraient leur figure. C'était épatant."

Il était fasciné par les hippopotames, comment ils sont capables si longtemps

de garder leurs immenses têtes "complètement submergées dans l'eau. Mais tranquillement ils lèvent leur tête", dit-il, ajoutant comment c'est éblouissant de voir respirer leurs deux immenses narines.

Mais enfin, c'est le gorille qui a réussi à faire fondre le cœur de Pierre. "Il a donné un coup contre la vitre. Cela a fait

peur à tout le monde." Ensuite cet animal qui nous ressemble tant, a exécuté une performance. "Du haut de la colline, il a fait des culbutes (somersaults). Il nous a tous fait rire."

On a marché pas mal, on a bien mangé, et on était content de voir Marlo (notre coordonnatrice) "se faire poser avec des léopards". Une bonne journée tout autour!

Susan Purcell

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 Christiani and
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 Dina Perron
 Catherine Marchitto
 Reda MacDonald
 Louis and Loretta
 Ottoni
 Richard Schlosberger
 Anne Pedicelli
 Claudette and Louis
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 José and Mario
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 Agnes M. Butz
 Nathalie Pedicelli
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 Carol Balderston
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In Honour of Audrey Bean,
 Marianne Metrakos and
 Sandra Baines
 Eleanor Beattie



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If so, please contact the office. You can also use this form to mail in your donation by cheque or credit card.

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