

ACTING IN ADVANCE

To discuss our new homelessness prevention service, we had the pleasure of speaking with Duane Mansveld, Coordinator of the Homelessness Prevention Network at Maison du Père. Since 1994, he has practiced psychosocial intervention with populations experiencing homelessness and those at risk of experiencing an episode of homelessness. His long experience both at shelters and in street work allows him to have a global vision of homelessness. This makes him a well-chosen person to talk about prevention.

The new service we are offering is a referral line aimed at health professionals, those in social services and the police. Investing in prevention is essential, Duane says. He affirms that “shelters must be a last resort”. He stresses the importance of acting in advance of a home loss to prevent homelessness.

The loss of a civic address brings stigma, a host of restrictions and inconveniences which have the effect of complicating the process of reintegrating into society for someone. In fact, when someone is left to the streets, they are deprived of access to services that are

nevertheless necessary and sometimes vital, such as the access to a convalescent home, to a crisis center, to the opening of a bank account, etc.

Also, the relevance of acting preventively is all the more real since, as Duane says: “often, what sends people to the streets is not the absence of services, but rather not knowing about those services that can be offered to them”. Acting in advance of homelessness setting in allows the worker to offer a greater variety of tools to their client to rectify their situation. For example, when someone is experiencing financial difficulties and is still in housing, it is possible to ask the Office municipal d’habitation de Montréal to see their housing subsidized.

Preventive intervention promotes housing stabilization and can help prevent the marginalization of the individual, as well as avoid the harmful effects caused by stress and various risk factors brought about by homelessness. For these reasons, we have equipped ourselves with a well-adapted referral tool to guide professionals throughout the network. The implementation of this tool has also



highlighted the needs of people at risk of experiencing homelessness in the near future.

For now, the resource is available on the phone, but Duane wants his project to evolve towards a smartphone application that would make the use of this prevention service faster and more intuitive. The goal: to maintain the person's residential identity, ideally in their own home.

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THE ACCÈS-SANTÉ SERVICE

Accès-Santé is a Maison du Père service which performs, among other things, physical and mental health check-ups of the men registered in the various programs of the organization, as well as its residents. The main objective is to minimize the deterioration of their health and ultimately to improve and stabilize it.

Accès-Santé also includes a convalescence unit. It is open to men aged 25 and over without an address who are coming out of hospital, or who are already in a precarious situation and who could lose their accommodation after the operation.

To comply with health requirements and prevent the spread of COVID-19, Maison du Père has not been able to accept anyone for more than a year. Today, the small team of auxiliary nurses and patient attendants is back in service: Maison du Père is ready to receive patients!

The convalescence unit does not exist to replace services offered in hospitals. In fact, a large portion of its patients come from the health and social services network. The approach used, adapted to the reality of our often marginalized clientele, makes it possible to treat men who were previously resistant to any treatment.

Beyond stabilizing their physical condition, the team makes sure to do its share of education. The employees support the

patient in taking medication and understanding their illness or physical health disorder. The patient is encouraged to adopt healthier lifestyle habits that will be beneficial for the stabilization and improvement of their general health.

Having a valid health insurance card, respecting the prescribed dosages as well as the requested follow-ups represent a major challenge for the men who no longer have an address.

In addition, they cannot access acute care facilities due to their status.

How can they solve their health problems, after surgery for example, if they have no place to recover and no one to look after them?

As part of the services offered by Maison du Père, the passage to the convalescence unit is also part of a process of social reintegration. This is why, when recommending a patient, professionals must draw up an overall portrait of the individual, including psychosocial information.

Maison du Père wishes to not only help stabilize the state of health but to also prepare for post-convalescence. The individual will not be left without support following their recovery in the convalescence unit: paired with a case-worker, they will have their situation assessed. Their short, medium and long term goals will be

established to see if they could enroll in a Maison du Père program or be referred to a more appropriate resource.

Maison du Père has already established good ties with workers in the health network; valuable partnerships with nurses, social workers and doctors, and it wishes to continue in this direction. It is through working together that we will find better solutions adapted to each individual, so that every street finds an exit...

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**LOOKING FORWARD
TO MEETING YOU!**

All smiles, advancing in a narrow corridor, Marie-Lou meets the many men living at Maison du Père, who greet her warmly. It's a busy, very busy day, but she answers each one, and each one by name. It is not only her red hair that illuminates this place, but also her loquacity, her vivacity and her manifest desire to communicate an unconditional acceptance to these people who find Maison du Père on their life path. This is the impression Marie-Lou left us, as we ourselves walked through the corridor of her impressions to better understand the difference she brings to our participants.

Marie-Lou is the organization's leisure activities intervention technician. This means that, on her shoulders, rests the responsibility of organizing and animating a multitude of activities: social ones, to break the isolation and encourage socialization, cultural ones, to nourish the mind, and physical ones, to keep in shape, while taking into account the special needs of the often older men at Maison du Père. The result: users can choose between, for example, meditation, yoga, visual arts, gardening, cooking, pétanque, chair dancing, visits to the museum or discussion sessions ... and even fishing fly crafting!

Speaking of flies, Marie-Lou caught the bug of her job as a teenager, working as a summer camp leader with children with disabilities. After high school, she considers going into social work, because of her desire to help others. "For me, leisure activities was not like a job, it was like a passion. I didn't know I could change lives with it, my whole life", she says. She then discovers the technical diploma of interven-

tion in leisure activities, a little-known discipline, but quite well cut out for her ambitions. She then obtains jobs with disabled and elderly people. After 12 years, she decides to change environments and joined the Maison du Père team.

"I don't regret my choice at all!", she assures us. Especially considering that the job came to her at a very opportune time. "If I had this job when I left school, I wouldn't have had the same background. I think today I can really bring something to them, and I know my job." When she arrived, "what was important for me was not to schedule too many activities from the beginning, and getting to know them", to facilitate exchanges, but also to understand the activities that could catch their interest.

For example, upon their arrival, a resident confides in Marie-Lou his dream of seeing an exhibit on the work of Salvador Dali, near the residence, at the Old Port of Montreal. Immediately said, immediately done: Marie-Lou organizes the visit for a small group of residents. "The exhibit was in three sections: we entered Hell, after that Purgatory, and after that Heaven", she says. In Hell were pictured all sins. The sight of the sins depicted in the first section then rekindles memories of a resident's bad decisions, who has to sit down to fully experience his emotions and cry... "You see then how therapeutic that can be."

This is what the Maison du Père activities make possible. More than entertainment, activities can be another way of accessing the feelings of participants, and allow for unblocking problems buried in the subconscious. It is also a way of



encouraging the adoption of healthier behaviors. "There is a resident, for example, who a few times said to me: 'Thanks to the fact that there are activities, while I'm with you, I'm not going to use substances.' Now, that is really rewarding."

In addition to cultural activities, other activities help maintain the physical health of the older residents, while other more social activities allow participants to get to know each other. Ultimately, the men's regaining control over their physical and mental health through activities may motivate recovery in other spheres of life. In short, Marie-Lou's work is a complement to the biopsychosocial interventions of the caseworkers.

If participants are successful in motivating themselves, activating themselves and opening themselves up, it is thanks to their personal strengths, first of all. But, we are convinced that Marie-Lou's philosophy of intervention has something to do with it also. "I'm not going to judge you if you did something wrong in your past", she says. "I have a great role. I am here to make sure their future is beautiful. "

Your phone close to your ear, you wait at the end of the line. A soft voice answers you, attentive and open. You have a question, a request for information or you wish to make a donation. This welcoming voice that will accompany you for the next few minutes is that of Benoît Rheault, administrative agent, or agent-of-all-trades, of Maison du Père!

Starting with his education in arts and literature, design and political science, Benoît has followed "an eclectic path, which corresponds well to the eclectic nature of [his] current position." In fact, thanks to his experiences at the Office des personnes handicapées du Québec, at Oxfam-Quebec and through other contracts in various companies, Benoît has perfected his writing skills, learned rigor and professionalism at work, and has developed an approach dedicated to customer service. Now pursuing his his career at the Maison du Père Foundation, we can easily notice Benoît's professional guiding thread, that of a sensitivity to community service, and to the fight against inequalities and injustice.

On a daily basis, Benoît responds to very different requests. "Need a pen? That's me! Need to write an official 10 page document and then translate it? That's me also!", he exclaims. "I order the stationery, I answer the phone, I process donations, I write, correct and translate texts, I do interviews that will be published in the newsletter or on the Web and I participate in the development of the communications strategy, in collaboration with my colleagues Geneviève and Francis, as well as with my supervisor, Manon."

But Benoît is first and foremost the voice of Maison du Père. His daily challenge lies in his brief conversations with donors: "In a short period of time, I have to communicate to the donor, over the phone, that they are important and respected. Donors are our backbone. From a financial point of view, they represent more than half of our funding. This is immense. This is more than government grants."

It often happens that donors worry about the amount of their donation, or wonder about the best way to give. It can be easy to think that bigger amounts are more desirable, but that's not exactly right. "If anyone is thinking of giving us a million, I'm a taker! », says Benoît, laughing. He specifies: "The majority of donors give according to their means, whether it is \$5 or \$2000. What makes a difference is regularity."

At Maison du Père, he adds, monthly donations are preferred. For donors, this is a simple solution that allows someone to include a donation in their expenses, without disrupting their budget. But it is also very advantageous for Maison du Père because, in order to carry out projects, the organization must be able to plan for the long term. "A \$10 monthly donation can



have a bigger impact than a spontaneous \$ 120 because it allows us to plan ahead."

Several donors are also preoccupied about the proportion of their donation that will be truly dedicated to the men who live at Maison du Père, and those that receive its help. Supporting people who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless is the very essence of the mission of the Maison du Père, explains Benoît. 90% of donations are therefore directly devoted to health services, social reintegration, housing maintenance, retirement homes, etc. Also, the percentage devoted to administration expenses ensures an efficient finance and accounting service and better practices in human resources so the organization can count on a professional and dedicated intervention team.

The next time you call to make a donation to Maison du Père, be sure to say hello to Benoît, who takes a real pleasure in talking with you. You are unique and precious. Without you, Maison du Père would not be able to fulfill its mission, and ensure that every street finds an exit...