

A Success Story

Maison des jeunes Défi-Ados Lévis, Quebec

Prevention, dialogue and action for young people in *La Zone*

In Lévis, right across from Quebec City, the La Zone mobile unit has been part of the urban landscape for over 15 years. It is a neutral zone where 12- to 20-year-olds can talk about their troubles, and has become an indispensable part of the Centre d'aide et prévention jeunesse.

Sowing the seeds of change: that is one way of describing the work of the people at the Centre d'aide et prévention jeunesse (CAPJ) in Lévis. The CAPJ, a non-profit organization created in 1983, started out by opening a youth centre, which now has two locations in the Lévis area. The CAPJ also offers supervised housing and has a solid street work team, a team of facilitators for park activities in summer and a socio-cultural space, L'Espéranto, for young people. As for *La Zone*, it has been the organization's flagship since 1988: this mobile unit is an oasis where thousands of young people have been able to talk about their problems and find solutions.

A mobilization unit

Like the youth centres, *La Zone* is a mobilization unit in the literal sense and figuratively speaking: "We want young people to know that sticking together and working together are the most effective ways of provoking change," explains CAPJ Manager, Richard Bégin. "Protesting and questioning come naturally to young people, and it is possible to do these things in a positive way." The CAPJ helps them achieve this by setting up social and cultural projects with them, from volunteer work with elderly people to theatrical productions. "These projects are a way to teach them to work together, negotiate and compromise," adds Richard Bégin. They also provide an opportunity for debunking many prejudices people have against society's younger members.

Meeting young people at the margins of society

Although Lévis has few homeless persons, the city still has a fair number of youths at risk. Many are left to their own devices by absent parents, while others, including drop-outs, unemployed people and single parents, live very isolated lives. *La Zone* goes to their neighbourhoods four evenings a week to help them out and let them know that they are not alone. "When we started out, we had an old truck that spent a lot of time at the garage," says Richard Bégin. "In 1998, the SCPI* gave us a little over \$70,000, which enabled us to buy a brand new vehicle. We took the opportunity to broaden our services by setting up a partnership with the people at the CLSC."

La Zone travels to the places where young loners at risk of becoming homeless live. One evening a week, the street worker on board is accompanied by a nurse, who informs the young people about health, nutrition and the prevention of STDs and blood borne infections or gives vaccinations against hepatitis B. The CLSC also lends a psychosocial worker to *La Zone*, who helps those who are worse off and refers them to services that can help them. Romantic relationships, relationships with parents or teachers, drug addiction or intimidation: all subjects are fair game at *La Zone* and confidentiality is guaranteed. Richard Bégin remembers how *La Zone* was able to solve a taxing problem in Old Lévis by listening and taking preventive action. Instead of using coercion, the people at *La Zone* gradually got the young victims to speak up, and they managed to help the intimidator understand the consequences of his actions, and referred him to the mental health services he needed. "Our young people have realized that listening and communicating can solve a lot of problems," explains Richard Bégin.

In addition to a contribution from the SCPI*, *La Zone* has also received assistance from local individuals: the tires were donated by a local merchant, Habel service de pneus. A local Tim Hortons supplies coffee and, for its image, *La Zone* has been able to rely on Vis-à-vis marketing et communications, a company in the St Romuald area, which designed its logo. With all these people pitching in to help keep in rolling, there's no doubt that *La Zone* will be part of the community in Lévis for a long, long time.

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*SCPI: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative