

A Success Story

L'Avenue Inc. Montreal, Quebec

L'Avenue: the road to dignity through stability

Signing a lease. Having a fixed address and furniture. Getting a life. Although these may seem like small things to many Canadians, to others, they often mark the first steps to finding their place in society. That's what L'Avenue has been offering its young clientele since 1987.

On de Castelnau Street in Villeray, 21 people now have their own roof over their heads, thanks to public housing provided by the Réseau des Petites Avenues. Many work for a living, while others are still in school, but all of them have made great strides since they arrived at L'Avenue, a shelter in Montreal's east end. L'Avenue uses an overall approach in helping 18- to 29-year-olds who are homeless. The organization offers three types of housing to help them gradually gain control over their lives.

An Avenue for young persons at risk

L'Avenue on Leclaire Street is the first stop for young people in distress. They stay there for six months or less and receive help 24 hours a day, seven days a week. "This gives them the stability they need so that they can take stock of their lives, and it gives us a chance to help them get back on track," explains François Villemure, Coordinator for L'Avenue's public housing. During their stay, they explore their prospects with a counsellor: social assistance, job searching or returning to school, all possibilities are considered. "In some cases, we help them complete a backlog of years of income tax returns, while in others, we help them to obtain identification papers," explains François Villemure.

With their physical and psychosocial needs being taken care of, L'Avenue's young tenants must abide by a code of ethics that involves respecting others, taking concrete steps to regain control over their lives and making daily efforts to rebuild their social networks. Once they have reached those objectives, they are ready to move on to the Réseau des Petites Avenues, which is a step toward independence.

A genuine school of life

The Petites Avenues concept was developed in 1996. The purpose of this innovative type of lodging is to teach young people how to live with others by sharing an apartment with other young people in the Hochelaga-Maisonneuve district. The project initially had only one apartment that could accommodate four young people. Today, through a SCPI* contribution, Les Petites Avenues has expanded and now has six apartments that can accommodate a total of 24 people. There is no question of room-mates sponging off the organization: each tenant has to pay \$245 a month, promise to abide by the group's code of ethics, keep the place clean, treat it with respect and show respect for others. In short, it is just like a real family.

The SCPI* has also helped fund the purchase and renovation of a building at 100 de Castelnau Street East, which has 21 public housing units and constitutes the third stage of L'Avenue's intervention scheme. After they have shared an apartment with room-mates for as long as they want, L'Avenue's young clients may move into one of these apartments for \$300 a month. They have a choice of a one-or two-and-a-half-room furnished place, heat and electricity included. "The tenants have regular leases," explains François Villemure, "and have the same rights and obligations as any other tenant." It is a winning formula, in that L'Avenue's residents almost always

get off the street. The only hitch is that out of the 1,000 people who apply to live at L'Avenue every year, only 100 will manage to get a place.

A major project for 2005

In addition to helping with the purchase and renovation of a 21-unit building, the SCPI* also funded the production of 16 training documents for young people and a broad study that has made it possible for Les Petites Avenues to share its expertise in running this type of organization. "Our study has inspired other organizations and has established our credibility by demonstrating that stability enhances the social network and employment situation of young people," says François Villemure. "We showed that young people who have a fixed address can overcome their difficulties." The SCPI* has also contributed to another project initiated by L'Avenue: the construction of a 16-unit building on Lasalle Street, near Leclaire Street. The building will welcome its first residents by Christmas 2005. That is a real boon for 28 young people who are already on the road to a better life.

by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

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*SCPI: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative