

## A Success Story

### **Solidarité Ahuntsic Montreal, Quebec**

#### **Accès-Soir RAP Jeunesse: comfort on four wheels in Ahuntsic-Cartierville**

*For the past three years, Accès-Soir has been combing the streets in a Montreal neighbourhood where prosperity and poverty exist in surprising proximity. This mobile intervention unit provides dozens of Ahuntsic-Cartierville residents with a sunny welcome and a sympathetic ear every day of the week.*

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A distinguishing characteristic of Montreal's Ahuntsic-Cartierville borough is the proximity of the wealthy and the poor. Just a few doors down from the offices of Solidarité Ahuntsic, which manages the activities of the Accès-Soir, stand elegant homes and beautiful tree-lined streets. Yet this neighbourhood contains three low-cost housing units, each with at least 100 apartments, and at the nearby Henri Bourassa metro station, it is not unusual to see people with hands outstretched to passers by in the hope of obtaining a few coins for a bite to eat. There is also a psychiatric facility a few kilometres away, and many former psychiatric patients are on their own, struggling to make a life for themselves.

Another feature of this neighbourhood is the fact that the local community organizations have established reliable and effective co-operation over the years through the formation of Solidarité Ahuntsic, an issue table that supported the creation of a mobile resource for people at risk of becoming homeless. This table has had many successful projects, including Accès-Soir, a mobile intervention unit for the street clientele. "Solidarité Ahuntsic has supported us from the start, by helping us present the project and find funding," recalls Louise Giguère, Director of Rue Action Prévention (RAP) Jeunesse, a member organization of the Solidarité Ahuntsic issue table, which is responsible for the activities of Accès-Soir. In addition to that, a \$380,068 contribution from the SCPI\* has helped defray part of the purchase cost for the vehicle, consolidate the activities of RAP Jeunesse and supplies part of the salary for support workers. "Without the SCPI\*, there simply would be no outreach projects or mobile unit in the entire Ahuntsic-Bordeaux-Cartierville area. Since services are already so scarce on our part of the island, we became a necessity as soon as we made our first round in 2002."

#### **Welcoming, listening and lending support**

The day they started cruising the streets of Ahuntsic and Cartierville, the people at Accès-Soir got two surprises: they received a warm, unbiased welcome, without a single negative reaction, in all the neighbourhoods—even the wealthiest ones. They also had dozens of visitors who spontaneously came to the door of the 32-foot mobile unit. "It was an excellent welcome; there was no resistance at all. By the end of the first year, over 1,000 people had come to see us." A good cup of coffee, a few words of advice and a compassionate ear is what the clients of Accès-Soir want; and having someone who will listen to them makes all the difference. "We try to forge ties with people so that if they want to, they can then come and talk to us about themselves. We first want to get through to them, then provide them with the tools to get back on track or refer them to resources that will help them do so," explains Louise Giguère.

Accès-Soir started out as an organization for young people, but it has broadened its client base, reaching out to 13- to 50-year-olds. Most of its clients are boys and men with a variety of problems: depression, problems at school, in their relationships or with money and mental health issues. Their needs are just as varied: "They may be hungry or want to talk a little or they may be having trouble finding a place to live. Under no circumstances do we try to change them; our approach is more

immediate. We just want to make a difference in their daily lives,” explains the RAP Jeunesse Director.

### **A tight-knit network**

Although few private businesses have responded to appeals by Accès-Soir, it is altogether a different story for the partnerships they have created with organizations. Accès-Soir can rely on an impressive network of partners who have made this organization extremely effective. A nurse from the CLSC occasionally drops by to talk about health issues and solve minor problems; sometimes a housing organization sends a representative to talk about tenants' rights. Among its allies, the mobile unit can count on *Moisson Montréal* and the Le Snack and La Corbeille food banks, which operate in the borough. In the area of mental health, Accès-Soir has a partnership with Relax-Action, which offers workshops and follow-up and support services, and La Parentèle, an organization for families with children with mental health problems. Then there is Amrac, a social reintegration organization, and the community's two CLSCs. Accès-Soir is well established in the borough, and has become an indispensable partner for people at risk of becoming homeless in the Ahuntsic-Cartierville area.

by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

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\*SCPI: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative