

A Success Story

Café rencontre centre-ville Québec, Québec

Café rencontre centre-ville: A home base in the heart of Old Québec

Are neighbourhood life and community solidarity enough to overcome social isolation? Probably not, but they do create the right environment. Québec's Café rencontre centre-ville has always understood this. It is a place where each visitor will find a warm smile, a good meal, and a friendly ear.

Québec winters are so bitterly cold, but it always smells of good soup and hot coffee at Café rencontre centre-ville. A team of volunteers, coordinated by Michel Godin who came to the Café in 1989, make sure of this. Michel is a constant presence, shaking hands with people who drop in, encouraging them, giving advice and, occasionally, sermonizing just a little.

We're in a large urban centre, yet everyone here knows one another. Michel explains that people who come here quickly feel at home because the group is a close-knit one. "It started out as a Christian café, but soon became a meeting place where people could find help and the means to solve their problems. When they come to eat here, they are often looking for a little more than just a meal. They want to be welcomed and listened to. That's what we offer."

Mental disability, depression, poverty, drug addiction, compulsive gambling—no matter what their story is, at Café rencontre, everyone is welcome and no one will be prejudged.

On the path to social reintegration

The welcoming atmosphere and the willingness of the volunteers at the Café rencontre centre-ville are the keys that open the door to a new life for many. Michel Godin notes that this is the case with Sonia. "She started out as a volunteer here. A few years later, she told me that she was out of work and couldn't get a job because she was so shy; the thought of being interviewed made her ill." With the support of people at the Café, Sonia developed better social skills. Today, Sonia works at the café's second-hand clothing store. This is just one of many projects that help those in greatest need in the community get back into the job market.

Then there are Jacques, Reynald and the others. They work in the Café kitchen, or have found their place in society, and just drop in from time to time to say a warm hello to their friends here, who are as dear as family to them.

The Café rencontre also takes a leadership role in helping people combat drug addiction: many are those who, after confiding in someone at the Café, have succeeded in ending their addiction. Reynald is one of them. A talented saxophone player, he used to be a familiar face on stages across Canada before he got involved in hard drugs. He is now part of the team at the Café rencontre. He has lost none of his musical talents, but he has added a natural gift for helping his fellow citizens.

SCPI:* A key partner

According to Michel Godin, government contributions under SCPI* are indispensable, although Café rencontre is funded to a large extent by donations from the public. SCPI* has allowed the organization to buy a van to transport volunteers and food, and move to larger premises. "Imagine! In 2003, we were serving 200 lunches a day, 40 people per sitting, but our kitchen was barely

bigger than that of the average home,” says Michel Godin. “We didn’t have an office or any space for administrative tasks.” The building purchased by the Café rencontre used to house a legendary eatery in Québec’s Lower Town: the Baril d’huîtres restaurant. The building will be renovated and brought up to standard, including the main room, which occasionally hosts evenings of Christian education sessions, street theatre, and lectures. Work should be completed by summer 2005. SCPI* has also helped the organization hire a full-time caretaker, as well as a person to work with adults and a psychologist to work with teens. This Initiative has contributed a total of \$662,144.

Networking: an effective tool in preventing homelessness

Financial assistance from SCPI*, along with support from partners such as Centraide, the City of Québec, and Moisson Québec, have been the crucial tools in the fight against homelessness in the city and have reinforced the solidarity among the aid agencies. “No one sleeps on the streets here because our city is one of the best in terms of emergency intervention measures. Cooperation among the organizations ensures that we can immediately help anyone who is in trouble.” The Café rencontre centre-ville is a key part of the safety net for preventing homelessness in Québec.

by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

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* SCPI: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative