

A Success Story

Centre Sida Amitié St Jérôme, Quebec

The Centre Sida Amitié in St Jérôme is a model partnership

The idea for the Centre Sida Amitié in St Jérôme came up during a community dinner in 1989. It has since developed an exceptional solidarity network, rallying public organizations and private enterprises to its cause and co-operating with them on a continual basis.

Without the help of the Centre Sida Amitié, 57-year-old Jean-Claude would probably still be wandering the streets, like hundreds of other homeless people. A former chef, he once worked in the kitchens of large hotels across Canada before sinking into alcohol and cocaine addiction. He started out at the Centre Sida Amitié (CSA) shelter in St Jérôme, then moved on to supervised lodging. Today, Jean-Claude is a restaurant staff manager, has just bought his first house and regularly visits his friends at the CSA.

The key to this success story is the partnerships that the CSA team has formed over the years. "Things haven't always been easy," recalls CSA Manager Josée Talbot. "We were lucky to win the Persillier-Lachapelle Award in 1994 for our prevention and health programs, because this established our organization's credibility."

Networking as a recipe for success

The CSA caters to the upper and lower Laurentians, a vast area with almost no public transportation and a widely scattered community network. To bring network components closer together, the CSA created partnerships to facilitate the sharing of services and resources, which proved to be an excellent plan. For instance, the public health network helped the CSA to purchase a mobile unit for street interventions and an SCPI* contribution made it possible to purchase a 15-seat mini-van to transport people to health services, help with small moving jobs and so on. The CSA also works with mental health staff from the Centre du Florès, which supplies the Centre with supervision for a counsellor to see people as soon as they arrive. In addition, a partnership with the health sector has enabled the CSA to open a clinic at its offices, with a physician and nurse on staff.

HIV-positive clients

The CSA's clients are mostly HIV-positive men over the age of 40 who have lived on the streets and very often have hepatitis C, use intravenous drugs and suffer from mental health problems or alcoholism. A few women also stay at the shelter and use the special services, such as the Café de la rue and food bank. "In every case, our centralized services have helped us to help people live normal lives," explains Josée Talbot.

Flexibility and effectiveness

The CSA's main building houses its offices and six beds in the emergency shelter on the second floor. The Café de la rue is across the street, providing a place to relax, take a shower, do laundry and have a bite to eat. Following their stay at the shelter, some clients spend up to a year in the supervised housing facility next door to the Café de la rue, which can accommodate up to nine people. They share the living room and kitchen and learn how to get along with others. "Some of their needs are as simple as learning how to cook, wash windows or take a daily shower," explains Josée Talbot. The supervised housing, which is self-financed through donations and 25% of the tenants' incomes, has been very successful in helping the great majority of its tenants to lead happy lives. The CSA also provides clothing, a needle exchange program and a referral service.

A unique form of regional solidarity

In addition to having forged ties with a large number of regional organizations and services, the CSA also receives funding from over 200 private businesses, often through partnerships. The CSA also receives donations from local businesses and large pharmaceutical corporations, such as Schering Canada. "Even the local sex shops give us products and donations!" explains the Manager of the CSA. The SCPI* contributed \$1,199,216. "The people at the SCPI* were the first to listen to us," says Josée Talbot. "Without them, we would never have been able to build for the future. For Jean-Claude and dozens of others, this spells the difference between a normal life and mere survival on the street."

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*SCPI: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative