

## A Success Story

### **Association pour le travail de rue de d'Autray Lavaltrie, Quebec**

#### **Young people in Lavaltrie find listeners, support and a sense of worth**

*Although the little town of Lavaltrie is a quiet, close-knit community, the problem of young people at risk of homelessness is the same here as elsewhere. Luckily, they can count on the streetworkers at the Association pour le travail de rue de d'Autray, whose compassion flows as freely as the nearby St Lawrence.*

-----

Neither a city nor a country town, Lavaltrie, on the north shore of the St Lawrence, is considered to be a suburb of Montreal, even though it is 80 kilometres away. Many people who choose to live here and commute to the city, are forced to spend many hours away from their homes and families. For Micheline Lemieux, Co-ordinator of the Association pour le travail de rue de d'Autray, this consequence of urban sprawl is partly why the organization has so many clients: "Young people here have just as many serious problems as those in big cities. Their parents often do not get home until early evening, and many young people, when left to their own devices, sometimes develop drug problems as early as age 12 or 13."

#### **A friend in the street**

Lavaltrie has had streetworkers since 1994. At first, there was only one; he actively listened to young people, tried to keep them from dropping out of school, and taught them about safe sex. He was so capable that the local CLSC took notice and recruited him. That is how the Comité de travail de rue de d'Autray was created. It went on to become the Association we know today which is recognized and funded by the Quebec Department of Health and Social Services.

#### **Tremendous need**

Lavaltrie has just under 12,000 inhabitants, including 1,250 young people aged 15 to 18 years. Between November 2002 and September 2003, Micheline Lemieux, who was alone at the helm of the Association at the time, carried out no less than 1,800 interventions with 294 young people. In the last couple of months, however, she has had help from two new streetworkers. "We carry out all kinds of interventions, and young people can reach us at all times on our pagers. Some talk to us about contraception or physical or sexual abuse, while others have drug problems or want information about STDs and a whole range of other subjects."

#### **Compassion, constancy and friendship**

The primary role of streetworkers in d'Autray is to listen, guiding young people to various resources that may help them. "You have to be tactful and patient. It often takes three to six months to get a young person to agree to see someone at the CLSC," explains Micheline. Luckily, the patience of the three streetworkers is often rewarded. "I remember S, for instance, whom I have known since 2000. At the time, she had just turned 16, had drug problems, had dropped out of school and was living with her boyfriend, who was often abusive. I saw her again last summer. She has gone back to school and wants to follow in our footsteps. She no longer takes the abuse, and is working with elderly people. When I meet young women like her, I realize that what we are doing here actually serves a purpose." Micheline and her team have also helped young people appear before the municipal council in their town to ask that the clubhouse in a Lavaltrie park be re-opened. "When young people feel they are being taken seriously, they can accomplish extraordinary things," says Micheline.

**SCPI:\* a lifeline**

The Association pour le travail de rue de d'Autray has received two contributions from the SCPI\*, totalling \$102,699. "This has helped us set up operations in proper offices, hire staff and co-ordinate the organization. We have also set up some joint projects, such as the one with the people at Carrefour jeunesse emploi in Berthierville, who regularly come to meet our young people and help them find jobs, go back to school or see what they can do with their lives. We even have an emergency bed in our offices," explains Ms Lemieux. Although the Association has reached cruising speed, many challenges still lie ahead and many young people need it to make sense of their lives and avoid life in the streets.

by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

June 2005

\*SCPI: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative