

A Success Story

La Maison de Jonathan Longueuil, Quebec

Taking wing ... at La Maison de Jonathan

La Maison de Jonathan was founded 10 years after the publication of Richard Bach's novel, Jonathan Livingston Seagull, which inspires hope through the life of a young seagull. Both a home and a school, as well as a second family to many a 12- to 17-year-old, in its 25-year existence, La Maison de Jonathan has helped over 2,000 young people take charge of their futures and avoid the road to homelessness.

Located in a neighbourhood like thousands of others in Canada, the house is almost anonymous. But behind the unremarkable façade of this Vieux-Longueuil home is a veritable beehive, where up to 28 young people and as many facilitators might be buzzing around at a time, and in the evening, 60 or so teens and adults participate in activities geared to preventing them from dropping out or becoming drug addicts. "Our job is to ensure that troubled teens, who are referred to us by local school boards and youth centres, develop an interest in going back to school," explains Fernande LeBlanc Sénéchal, General Manager of La Maison de Jonathan. "Most of the time, we manage to get them back in school; these are amazing teens, and often, all they need is a real opportunity and a little help to pull through."

Young lives gone astray

It is a misconception to think that young people drop out or experience serious academic problems because they do not like school or are just plain lazy. Lack of interest in school is usually the result of serious personal and family problems, which put these young people at risk of becoming homeless. Imagine a young girl coming home to find that her mother has hung herself in the kitchen, or a 15-year-old boy, after years of verbal abuse by his father, sinking into drug addiction and becoming a complete introvert. Young people need our help, support and understanding.

Volunteers from all walks of life

La Maison de Jonathan is a very lively place, largely because of the 75 or 80 volunteers who support the staff and keep the wheels of the organization turning. Ranging in age from 35 to 80, the volunteers include senior and middle managers from big companies and retired teachers. The teens arrive in the morning and sometimes have breakfast. They then participate in three craft workshops—ceramics, enamel, painting and leatherwork—and an academic workshop designed to re-acquaint them with basic academic subjects—French, English and math. Each one of them gets one-on-one attention from a good listener who does not judge them or have any preconceived ideas. "Each one of us works to help these teens and give them love. We all know that we are working with remarkable boys and girls who have had some very traumatic experiences," explains Ms LeBlanc Sénéchal. In the evening, from 5:30 to 8:15 pm, other young folks who are still in school, but are at risk of dropping out or becoming homeless attend similar workshops at La Maison.

Promising young lives

Like the seagull in Bach's novel, hundreds of young people have taken wing after spending a few months at La Maison de Jonathan. They are all monitored for three to five years, which has given us a chance to watch their talents take flight and to see them develop new interests and begin "real" lives as young adults. A young man who recently got married came to show us his first child. Two young women have become social workers and are helping other young people. All the teens who went back to school aspire to a stable, normal and happy life.

More space and more activities thanks to the SCPI*

La Maison de Jonathan was established in 1981 with the co-operation of the Frères de l'instruction chrétienne and the Brothers of the Sacred Heart. In addition to support from partners such as Centraide, the SCPI* contributed over \$500,000 in 2004 to expand La Maison, doubling the floor space of the house, which can now accommodate eight more teens during the day and about 15 more in the evening. With La Maison's success rate of over 85% right from the start, the more than 2,000 young people whom we probably saved from the street and the recent interest of a group of teachers who came from Bordeaux, France, to observe our successful formula so they can adapt in France, La Maison de Jonathan has every reason to spread its wings and soar to even greater heights.

by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

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*SCPI: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative