

A Success Story

Action-Travail région de Matane Matane, Quebec

A door, a roof and a window for young people in the Matane MRC

Many young people in the Lower St Lawrence region have the same problems as those of young people in the big cities: dysfunctional families, a high drop-out rate and chronic unemployment. For a year now, the Une porte, un toit, une fenêtre project has given them a safe haven where they can get a good start in life.

M, who is in his early twenties, is particularly proud of what he has accomplished in the past year. The people who worked with him are also happy to see their young protégé holding a steady job and living in a “real” apartment, after spending a year re-organizing his life. “When M came to the Carrefour jeunesse emploi, L’Abri, our transitional housing facility, had not yet opened. After living in the Montreal area for a while, he came back here to his native region. He had nothing: on top of his difficult relationship with his parents, he was staying with his sister, who did not have enough room for him. His belongings consisted of a couple of suitcases and a monthly welfare cheque. M was our first young boarder.” M was in debt, unemployed and living on the street when he moved into L’Abri and enrolled in adult education courses. He then went in for vocational training and has finally entered the job market, having found employment that he likes. His new-found stability has made it possible for him to gradually reconnect with his family, with whom he now enjoys a much better relationship. “That’s definitely our best story,” say the workers at L’Abri. In fact, it was an auspicious beginning for a brand new project in the Matane MRC.

A place to break out of the cycle of poverty

L’Abri is a transitional housing facility that was purchased and renovated as part of the *Une porte, un toit, une fenêtre* project that was implemented by Action-Travail région de Matane, a non-profit corporation founded in 1982 that offers a range of services through special projects, which complement the area’s existing resources. Since 1995, Action-Travail région de Matane has been targeting its activities mainly to 18- to 25-year-olds, a segment of the local population that is particularly at risk of running away and becoming homeless. That was why the transitional housing facility was opened. “We wanted to offer young people a place where they could set down their burdens just long enough to regain control over their lives,” explains someone who works closely with them.

L’Abri provides them with a structured existence that resembles life in a real family and frees them temporarily from having to worry about their basic needs. Life at L’Abri is like life in a real home: the young residents have to make meals and do housework, but their needs are seen to so that they can concentrate on finding a job or eventually going back to school.

Most of L’Abri’s residents are young men in their twenties. They are supported by two workers, and a supervisor oversees the project. The workers live with them and coach them, a little like big sisters would.

A brand-new project

Une porte, un toit, une fenêtre officially got off the ground in March 2004, after months of work by the people at Action-Travail région de Matane. The house underwent renovations from late 2003 to spring 2004. The people at Action-Travail région de Matane received support from local residents, many of whom pitched in to help with the work. Young people helped paint the place; furniture for the three bedrooms and the rest of the house was obtained for bargain prices at flea markets or

provided by good Samaritans. All this support kept renovation and furnishing expenses to a minimum without compromising on the comfort of the young residents.

A contribution that will go a long way

Through the youth homelessness component of the National Homelessness Initiative, the Government of Canada made a first contribution of \$93,500 to L'Abri and a second contribution of \$14,500. Other partners also helped set up the project, including Action-Travail région de Matane, which provided \$10,500 in cash and \$15,000 in materials, the Fonds régional d'investissement jeunesse, a Quebec government youth investment fund, which gave \$37,312, and Carrefour jeunesse emploi in Matane, which provided services and resources free of charge. The Cuisine collective, a community kitchen in Matane, also supports L'Abri by seeing to it that the young residents eat properly and by offering courses and support to that end. L'Abri is now on track: the biggest challenge in the coming years will be financial consolidation so that it can continue to offer its services and help young people in the Matane MRC, such as M, to stay off the street and get a new lease on life.

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