

## A Success Story

### **Native Friendship Centre Québec (Quebec)**

#### **At the Native Friendship Centre in Quebec City, solidarity and self-help go hand in hand**

*First Nations peoples are said to have a strong sense of community. However, that is not always enough to help Aboriginal persons who have just arrived in a big city. In Quebec City, thanks to the Native Friendship Centre, they have somewhere to go to seek refuge and find the resources they need to build a new life.*

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More and more Aboriginal people are dreaming of life in big cities. They are leaving their native lands to go to Montreal, Quebec City and other southern destinations. "With the Internet, TV and telecommunications, Aboriginal people from remote regions know that life in the city is often synonymous with better living," explains Jocelyne Gros Louis, Director General of the Native Friendship Centre (NFC). But once they get there, the life awaiting them is often more nightmarish than a dreamlike: not only are they broke and unemployed, but many wind up homeless after staying with friends or relatives for a few days. "Their only option is living on the street and everything that entails: drug addiction, prostitution and so on. This is made even harder by the fact that they also have to deal with intolerance and prejudice," adds Ms. Gros Louis. The NFC has introduced a range of services for these people, the majority of whom are young, to tide them over and help them avoid homelessness or get off the streets.

Founded in the 1970s, the NFC first set up shop in an old building on Valcartier Boulevard, in the Loretteville district of Quebec City. Then it bought some land on St Louis Street and built a centre that opened in 1988. Today it is the nucleus of a complete service infrastructure for Aboriginal people at risk of becoming homeless and in need a helping hand.

#### **Shelter and much more**

An initial \$311,749 contribution by the SCPI\* in 2002 enabled the NFC to establish the first component of its services, hiring homelessness prevention workers, a streetworker and a social reintegration specialist. The following year, a second contribution, this one for \$302,153, enabled them to open a drop-in centre, the RoReKe café, on Morissette Street, near the NFC, providing a place to go, support and referral services for those just arriving from the regions, as well as other services covered under the NFC's Programme de prévention à l'itinérance, a homelessness prevention program. "Their services include assistance for those going back to school and distribution of food baskets to those in need," says Jocelyne Gros Louis.

In 2003–2004, the program helped over 200 people, mostly women, some of them as young as 15 years old. Located next to a beautiful wooded area, the day centre on Morissette Street is an oasis where those in greatest need can find peace and comfort. The dining area is much like a restaurant dining room and there is also a day care centre that can accommodate 30 children, which was inaugurated in April 2005. Aboriginal persons studying in Quebec City and those passing through can eat lunch and dinner there. For partial funding, someone had the bright idea of opening the centre to the public, selling banik and offering a catering service that is doing well. The RoReKe café was recently renovated and now has Internet stations, offices and a conference room, and, most importantly, a capable, friendly team of social workers co-ordinated by Carl Thibodeau, a burly guy with a radiant smile. Among the numerous people he has helped since the centre was established, Mr Thibodeau particularly remembers Jean-Philippe, a 27-year-old Aboriginal man from Alberta: "You could say that we saved his life. He had nothing, was suicidal and had lost all

hope. Today, he is making his way in life and sometimes stops by to say hello. We are all very proud of who he has become.”

**The Auberge Cap au Nord**

The SCPI\* also helped fund emergency bedrooms and a full-time position in the Auberge Cap au Nord, formerly a hotel on St Foy Road. The small 14-room inn was renovated in 2003 and 2004. It offers emergency shelter and also welcomes Aboriginal persons coming to Quebec City to receive medical care. When they arrive at the inn, a homelessness prevention worker takes care of them, providing psychological support and helping them to settle in. This past year, the SCPI\* contributed another \$190,088 to the NFC to cover the services provided by the inn and the day centre workers' salaries. Thanks to this contribution, the NFC can continue to provide a meeting place for Aboriginal persons who want to integrate into society and avoid becoming homeless. This is what really matters when, as in the case of Jean-Philippe, getting off the streets means saying “yes” to life.

by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

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\*SCPI: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative