

A Success Story

Mères et monde Québec (Quebec)

Mères et monde: a fairy godmother for young mothers in the Quebec City area

Mères et monde is transforming an old school into a school of life for young mothers aged 16 to 30; its mission is to help them regain control of their lives, take charge of their families and become leading women in society.

The days when young unwed mothers were forced into isolation are long gone. This becomes obvious the minute you cross the threshold at Mères et monde, in Limoilou. Located in what was once Saint-Maurice school, the organization offers 23 housing units and a community centre for young mothers from the Quebec City area. "Our approach is different from that of traditional aid organizations. Here, young mothers learn to develop life plans and put them into action; they also take an active part in community life. They sit on our Board of Directors and various committees and learn to make decisions, assert themselves and take charge of their lives," explains Mères et monde co-ordinator Johanne Beauvillers.

Mères et monde grew out of the *Projet de vie pour jeunes mères*, which was created in 1994 through joint action by various local organizations. It first opened in the Centre Jacques-Cartier, a community centre and housing facility for young people aged 16 to 30 in the Quebec City area. Then it moved to a small space next to a day care centre. Through a contribution from SCPI,* it was able to buy the former school and refit it to accommodate its first residents in January 2004.

Learning to live and assert themselves in society

The young women who come to Mères et monde are referred by schools, community kitchens and CLSCs. Some of them have been abused and many are at risk of being runaways or homeless for varying lengths of time, because of lack of resources. They need a break, a little time for themselves and, mostly, to know that they are not alone. "Here, they have time to reflect on their lives. Some opt to go back to school, while others enter the labour market," says Ms Beauvillers. Always, Mères et monde provides guideposts and the time needed to make choices. The young women learn time management skills and can participate in self-help groups on violence prevention. Those planning to go back to school can take refresher courses in French and math. All learn to make decisions, negotiate, manage their lives, education and careers, and become involved in the community through communal living in the centres' housing units and the activities offered downstairs. The time they spend at Mères et monde prepares them for life in a practical way with concrete results.

Many young women who have lived in one of the 23 supervised units or participated in the organization's activities have completely turned their lives around. Marie, for instance, worked 20 hours a week on an *Emploi-Québec* social integration project. "She had taken some college-level courses in social science, and through the project, she discovered that she had management and accounting skills. Marie is now the treasurer of our board of directors and president of a housing co-op, and she prepares our budget forecasts. She is a confident, capable young woman, and we have complete faith in her," says Johanne Beauvillers. Then there was Catherine, a young mother who came to the centre because she felt isolated. She took courses to become a birthing coach at a birthing centre, and is currently Chair of Mères et monde. Katia has become a children's clothing designer. Many other young women have been able to carve wonderful niches for themselves in their communities, thanks to the support they received at Mères et monde.

Public and private support

In addition to support from SCPI* (which has contributed over \$450,000 toward the purchase, renovation and management of the former Saint-Maurice school), Mères et monde has received assistance from the Société d'habitation du Québec, the Caisse populaire de Limoilou, the Limoilou Borough Council and private companies, such as Laboratoires Pouliot, which supplies shoes every year to the mothers and their children, boutique La Commode, which provides fabric to make clothes, and the Centre chiropratique Neufchâtel, which offers low-cost treatments to the mothers and children. This impressive support network is the pride of the Mères et monde team, which in 10 years has been able to help some 500 young women and at least as many children.

by Human Resources and Skills Development Canada

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*SCPI: Supporting Communities Partnership Initiative